

**SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

May 29, 2019

A Need to Reform Academic Distress Commissions



INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY

Jill Ackerman

Superintendent of Lima City Schools

755 Saint Johns Avenue

Lima, Ohio 45804

(419) 996-3422

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify as an interested party in connection with House Bill 166. My name is Jill Ackerman and I currently serve as the Superintendent of Lima City Schools. I would like to share a snapshot of our school district to include everyday challenges our students face at home and in their neighborhoods - both academic and non-academic. I have spent 31 years at Lima City Schools, where I started as a substitute teacher and worked my way up to superintendent in 2012. Lima has four elementary schools, two middle schools, two magnet schools, and one high school. We have a total student population of 3,891 students.

Societal Issues That Lead to Student Performance Deficiencies

As with many other mid-sized urban districts in the state, many of our students face societal issues outside of the classroom, which then carries over into the classroom and their academic performance. In our district, many of our students live in poverty, which results in a number of distractions such as: community violence, drug addiction, unreliable transportation, high mobility rates, less parental or adult supervision, and higher incidences of stress. Due to these societal issues, we are now seeing an increase in physical and emotional trauma in our students. Additionally, 23% of our students are on individual education plans (otherwise known as IEPs) and are receiving special education services. As a comparison, the statewide average for students on IEPs is 14%. The above list is not an excuse for student performance, but rather is a snapshot of the societal challenges our students face, which may be substantially different than other school districts in our surrounding area.

Despite the above-described challenges, many of our students attain high academic marks. Some of our students regularly participate in competitions at the local, state, national, and international level. These students have placed in the top ten in competitions to include the NASA Rover Challenge at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center and the international DECA competition.

Why is it that some of our students struggle while others excel? Two students sitting in the same classroom with the same teacher can have widely divergent academic performance outcomes. In those situations, the home life, societal issues and effort given by the student will have a greater impact and/or hindrance upon his or her performance than the skill of the teacher.

Academic Action Steps

We have taken great strides at attempting to bridge the academic performance gap. Action steps that our district has undertaken to include:

1. Heavy leadership coaching with the Research for Better Teaching Program to help our teachers utilize data to drive instruction.
2. Expanded preschool offerings. We are now providing busing for our preschool students to ensure that they have transportation, which improves attendance, especially for young families.
3. We are working with IBM to more quickly assess student data to drive better outcomes.
4. Most recently, we began participating in instructional rounds utilizing the peer-to-peer model developed by the Mid-Sized Urban Districts Leadership Collaborative. This voluntary Leadership Collaborative offers side-by-side and peer-to-peer support with educators in districts with similar demographics.

Non-Academic Action Steps

While we can address student performance from an academic perspective, it is equally important to address societal challenges. While we work well with other schools in Allen County, it is hard to collaborate when your student population and day-to-day issues are so very different. We have taken many non-academic action steps to include:

1. Development of strong community partnerships to include opening a health center to service the Lima City Schools students and families.
2. We are adding four fulltime mental health specialists to work with student trauma.
3. We have partnered with the West Ohio Foodbank to open food pantries for families in our district.

Provisions Currently in HB166 That Should Remain Part of the Legislation

The following tools will enable the districts to continue their efforts in improving student performance.

1. Dissolution of the ADC state takeover model for lower-performing districts.
2. Measuring student performance by building, not by district.
3. A substantial increase in wrap around services to help support non-academic issues for lower performing districts (the original intent of HB70).
4. ODE technical support for districts that are struggling with sustained student performance.

I thank you for allowing me to testify and would be happy to answer any questions.