

Daniel C. Falk
English Learner Teacher
Lorain City School District

House Bill 70
ADC Impact Testimony
May 29, 2019

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the impact of the Academic Distress Commission (ADC) in Lorain City School District.

My name is Dan Falk. I am an English Learner (EL) teacher at General Johnnie Wilson Middle School. I just completed my sixth year of teaching in Ohio. Previously, I taught for two years on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program in Sapporo, Japan and one year in Unalakleet, Alaska. I am strongly opposed to House Bill 70 passed by the 131st General Assembly based on its negative impact on the students, families, and teachers of Lorain.

When I began at General Johnnie Wilson Middle School, the district's English as a Second Language (ESL) program was far from perfect. EL students were lumped together and placed in large classes alongside students with learning disabilities. I began working with the principal to develop a school-wide ESL program whereby students were strategically scheduled in classes with peers and teachers who could help them grow in their English language proficiency. My input and training as an ESL teacher was taken seriously as we collaborated to improve the outcomes of ELs.

When Dr. Jeffrey Graham entered the district as Superintendent I began to see changes for our ELs expand district-wide. Dr. Graham organized an "EL Engagement Committee" comprised of EL teachers, administrators, and district leaders to identify and problem-solve issues related to English Learners in Lorain. As a member of this team, I was proud of the work we accomplished. We advocated for the creation of the position of EL Supervisor to oversee the district ESL program, hired two full-time translators to serve district-wide, updated the district website with information about our program, partnered with El Centro (local non-profit social service provider for Latinos) to create a parent engagement program, and secured the ACHIEVE grant to get Lorain teachers TESOL endorsed, among many other things.

However, when Mr. David Hardy was selected by the ADC, conditions began to worsen for our EL students and families. I attended all of his monthly Town Hall meetings during his first year in Lorain and offered my feedback in person and by email. He acknowledged my concerns, but

did not seem too interested in continuing the work Dr. Graham initiated for ELs. Under Mr. Hardy the EL Engagement Committee disbanded, our ESL staff was no longer permitted to attend EL-specific professional development at the Ohio TESOL conference or NOELL Collaborative, the parent engagement program for Latino parents was discontinued, most district meetings no longer have a translator available for Spanish-speaking parents, the district's official social media accounts quit putting out information in Spanish, and our building secretary was directed to no longer speak Spanish to parents without an administrator present.

At General Johnnie Wilson Middle School our building principal decided to change the entire building schedule mid-year after winter break. Part of her plan included taking away all ELs' gym, art, STEM, and College and Career Readiness classes in favor of an intensive English class taught by me. When she proposed this plan at a staff meeting before break, I requested to meet with her to discuss the impact of this decision. At the meeting, my supervisor echoed my sentiments about taking away ELs' internents based solely on their limited English proficiency. My principal disclosed that her decision was based on a model she saw in Texas after Mr. Hardy sent a team of Lorain City School District employees and ADC members to tour IDEA Public Schools in San Antonio. She asserted that those schools were able to get newcomer ELs to score proficient on state standardized tests after one year of living in the country.

I was, admittedly, skeptical of this claim because current linguistic research indicates that English Learners take 4-7 years to attain proficiency in academic language (Hakuta, K., Butler, Y.G., & Witt, D, 2000). I reached out to a contact of mine from UnidosUS based in San Antonio who does advocacy work for Latino students and families. He asserted that some schools in Texas have "segregated" ELs from their peers and placed them in intensive test-preparation classes all day long; removing them from required classes. He noted that UnidosUS had to intervene on multiple occasions to advocate for the civil rights of these EL students.

In May of 2017 my principal nominated me for the Lorain City School District employee "Rising Star Award," which was presented to me by Dr. Graham. He recognized me for my work with expanding parent engagement for Latino parents, for professionally developing coworkers on best practices for ELs in the classroom, and creating videos highlighting teacher best practices in our building (<https://www.lorainschools.org/Page/3699>).

Two weeks ago my principal came before this committee to boast about three points of pride from our school. One point was the Ohio English Language Proficiency Assessment (OELPA) results that I shared with staff the day prior to her testimony. I emailed out the student results, sharing how we exited four students from our ESL program and how over two-thirds of students made growth in, at least one domain of their English language proficiency. Less than a week after her testimony (last Tuesday) my principal called me into her office an hour before student

dismissal on the final day of classes and presented me with contract non-renewal letter; hand-signed by Mr. Hardy. No reason for my termination was provided.

This is how our district now operates under the ADC and CEO model. We are no longer valued partners and morale is at an all-time low. Teachers are fearful of reprisal for speaking out for students. This fear is real and tangible as Mr. Hardy forced the entire Lorain High School staff to re-apply for their positions and gave non-renewal letters to many non-tenured teachers during the last two months.

A few months ago, ADC members created a staff survey based on goals outlined in the *Lorain Promise* that was completed by 31 teachers in my building (nearly all teachers). One question asked us if we agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “The teachers and building administrators work together as a collaborative and cohesive team in the best interests of students.” Only 19% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Our Building Leadership Team (BLT) only met once this year in October to establish dates for subsequent meets that never took place. Another statement surveyed was, “The culture and climate throughout the district is positive, and I feel valued and respected as a teaching professional.” 87% of my colleagues strongly disagreed or disagreed. In my first four years at General Johnnie Wilson Middle School, we had one of the lowest turnover rates of teachers in the district. We would typically lose one or two teachers at the end of each school year. However, we have lost eleven teachers throughout this school year (including me and two very talented teachers whose contracts were not renewed).

If House Bill 70 is not repealed and this state takeover model is perpetuated, I fear Lorain will continue to hemorrhage many great educators who have dedicated their lives to some of Ohio’s most at risk children. I urge you to involve students, teachers, community members, and the local board of education in the decision-making process to find a solution to the problems House Bill 70 has created.

Respectfully,



Daniel C. Falk
EL Teacher
Lorain City School District