

Senate Testimony HB 166

As you are considering your discussions and amendments to HB 166 and the importance of finding ways to make sure all of our children, regardless of socio-economic status, throughout the state of Ohio are receiving the best educational process that they deserve, I continue to ask that you truly put kids first in your discussions and decisions. While we all believe our words and ideas put our students first, however, it is only in our actions that our true intentions materialize.

I have been with Lorain City Schools in many different capacities. I attended Lorain City Schools, am a parent of a LCS graduate, was a teacher in the district, was the LEA union vice-president, and now am serving as a building principal. My entire educational career has been with Lorain City Schools and have experienced the many changes this district has undergone in the last 24 years. Believe it or not, I have been a part of the district when it has experienced success with state accountability measures and saw what happens when high expectations meet adult accountability for the success of our students. I have experienced stress, frustration and disappointment when every 2-4 years we had a change in district leadership which always led to complete overhauls of district staff, initiatives, philosophies, focus goals and even simple educational language all in the name of "kids".

During all those transitions, what I haven't experienced since the last measure of success yielded a district "C" on a report card was displayed for Lorain City Schools, was an intentional, deliberate focus on curriculum and instruction. What I have seen are words in plans of "increase scores on the state report cards" and "provide professional learning" and checklist of "yep, we did that" with committees and boards and ADC's nodding with agreement of "yep, it looks good. And yet, we are still here wondering why our kids can't perform.

So as I, we in Lorain, are patiently waiting for the next "transition" to take place in our district, I ask that those charged with choosing these new stakeholders on the School Commission Committee mentioned in this bill, understand how crucial and important those individuals are and that they are 100% confident that they are in this game for the right reasons. That those they chose can separate what is good for kids from "who" made past decisions, that they can separate what is good for kids from personal grievances or agendas, that those chosen select to ask the right questions to lead us to become better and not to push an agenda. I then, can only hope that the new stakeholders can advocate for those things that lead to success for our students and be able to set aside all those adult fears or roadblocks that come when we, as adults, are asked to step up and change.

I ask that there is a true accountability for those stakeholders on these committees and that they understand that change comes with fear and pushback, but can persevere if those changes push us to become better and not be okay with mediocrity or excuses. I ask that these stakeholders are able to make tough, and sometimes not popular decisions, that remove obstacles that may hold us back from reaching our potential. I ask that these stakeholders

understand that there are non-negotiables that need to be in effect, ones that affect our kids everyday, and to make sure that we are aligning our actions with our words: providing in depth, true professional development that challenges teachers to think differently, pushes their skill set even if it challenges their comfort zone, providing rigorous curriculum, not just a bought pre-packed savior, that holds high expectations for our students and doesn't shortchange them because of where they live or how much they have experienced in their lives, and allowing (and demanding) a culture of feedback be at the center of all we do everyday so improving instruction is the focus no matter how uncomfortable that may be.

Finally, as you hear testimony, discuss your options and try to come to a consensus for something that will help struggling district rise to the challenge of leveling the playing field for our kids, please consider that while in the midst of reflection and altering some of the mishaps that may have happened with the last legislation, you are directly affecting people living and working in an already struggling environment. Do your changes and process ensure accountability and involve all stakeholders? Will these changes send already struggling districts into further turmoil? We need you and those who will be charged with transforming our district to acknowledge that the focus of the district needs to be directly related to what impacts kids, instruction in the classroom. If what we are doing now is transforming the way we teach and creating an educational culture that thrives on getting better, despite the noise, we need those individuals to be able to understand the difference between the power to change and the need to change.

Rae Bastock