



CLEVELAND TEACHERS UNION

The Halle Building, 1228 Euclid Ave. Suite 300 • Cleveland, Ohio 44115 216/861-7676

fax: 216/861-4113

Shari Obrenski, President

www.ctu279.org

CTU President Shari Obrenski's Testimony on SB 358

**Senate Education Committee
SB 358 Proponent Testimony
Presented by Shari Obrenski,
President Cleveland Teachers Union**

September 23, 2020

Chair Lehner and Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Education Committee. I am Shari Obrenski, President of the Cleveland Teachers Union. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on SB 358 addressing accountability measures that need to be modified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When I became the President of the CTU on April 16th from my predecessor David Quolke, I never could have imagined that today, September 23, we would still be in the middle of this crisis. I am sure, like many of you, I thought we would be able to resume school in August and pick up right where we left off in March. Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

In the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, in a city that has been named the most poorly connected city just this month according to Connect Your Community and reported by Great School Voices and my CEO Eric Gordon, we are in the midst of an enormous transformation in the delivery of our educational services to our city's children. At the beginning of the pandemic, most of our children had no devices of their own and little to no internet access. We have now ensured that all of our students will have their own device and working internet service provided to them by the District.

This has been no small undertaking. Students, parents, and even teachers who did not have access to functioning technology as part of their everyday lives, let alone their education, are now teaching and learning completely online. This is a radical transformation for all of us in CMSD. The fundamental way we have done our jobs, and our students have done their learning, has been turned on its ear.

While everyone in our school community is working very hard to make learning happen, it is excruciatingly difficult work, requiring hours of planning and preparation over and above what would normally be required by teachers and other school personnel, monitoring and facilitating by parents and other caregivers, many of whom have very little technological expertise themselves, and a fundamental shift in learning processes by our students.

I say all of this to give you a clear picture of what is happening in our schools each and every day without the added burden, stress, and expense of mandated testing. Testing that offers teachers and students very little in the way of informing instruction and learning. Testing that we cannot do safely in person, nor can we ensure its security in a remote environment. Results that we will not see until next school year, far too late to assist us in what is happening right here and now.

Teachers, as we return to school and get our students online, are in the midst of assessing where students are right now. While learning did not stop in March, we know that the formal education students received was not what we would normally expect and that there is work to be done to provide students with the learning experiences that will help them succeed. We will continue to monitor student progress, make adjustments, reteach as necessary, and work as efficiently and quickly as we can to move our students forward.

Continuing the exemption on student testing allows us to focus on that important work. Resuming testing, on the other hand, takes valuable time away from our task. While in a remote setting, it takes much longer to test students. Teachers can test as many students as we can see on our screens. We cannot control for environmental distractions or assistance from well-meaning care-givers. We also do not get results in any length of time that would make the doubling and tripling of testing time worthwhile for students or teachers. At this moment in time, it is far more valuable to preserve the precious time that teachers and students have to teach and learn, to make up for lost opportunities, and to focus on what really matters.

Additionally, the exemption regarding teacher evaluation needs to be extended, as well. Our current system of evaluation was not designed to operate in the classroom space that we currently occupy. Whether remote, or in-person, these are not normal times. Teachers and students are finding their way in uncharted territory, with levels of stress we have never experienced before. Concentrating on the fundamentals, learning how to effectively operate in this environment, and focusing all of our resources on helping our students and their families, as well as our educators, to be successful in these times needs to be our priority.

For a bird's-eye classroom teacher's view of what it is like to teach and learn in this environment, I would like to present my colleague, 4th grade teacher Tracy Radich.