

Senate Education Committee
Proponent Testimony for SB 358
Presented by Karen Rego, Teacher and
President Cleveland Heights/University Heights
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Senator Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Karen Rego and I am a proud public educator at Monticello Middle school in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City Schools. I have been teaching for 21 years. I have taught everything from kindergarten to my current assignment of 8th-grade math. I am also the president of the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union.

We need to have a pause in teacher evaluations, district grades and state testing. We need the time to catch students up. Since the closure, last spring, our teachers, students, and families have stepped up to do the best they could given the circumstances around child care, job loss, and virtual learning. We have spent time trying to help our families and catch our students up from lost instruction. We did this overnight, turning our homes into our virtual classrooms. We quickly felt we needed to be available 24/7 because everything was so new to everyone, and we had to learn fast. We all did the best we could, but we know many of our students because reasons not related to school fell behind. Teachers need time. Time to fill in the gaps. Time to catch students up. But time spent on summative assessments or an evaluation that does very little to inform a teacher's practice in a pandemic takes away valuable time from the work we must do to catch students up. The good news is we can catch students up because that is what teachers do.

Vouchers

In Cleveland Heights, we have to do more with less. Cleveland Heights takes on a huge financial hit because of Edchoice vouchers. Our students receive less than their private school counterparts in state aid. Those who chose our public schools, a majority-minority school district, are the ones hurt by vouchers} because ninety-five (95%) of the students using vouchers in Cleveland Heights never went to our schools. They are not leaving their quote bad public school. They always intended to be a private school attendee. We should not pit a neighbor against a neighbor. We desire to create fair funding for all. I bring this up because district grades and testing are used to divert public funds for private education. So again, we have to do more with less. At some point, teachers won't be able to do more with less. Throughout my career, my colleagues have done more with less, but we can't continue anymore. The state has to pay for students who never attended our schools. Cleveland Heights has lost \$ 7 million last year and almost \$10 million this year. We need every penny to catch students up.

Evaluations

Whether one teaches in-person five days a week, blended model, or all virtual, we are all new teachers. The first day of school was the first day for all of us. We had to learn new online programs. We had to learn how to socially distance children, which by the way, is impossible. That is not what children do. Through all this, we have tried to make it work because that is what teachers do. How does one conduct evaluations based on a situation that hasn't occurred in 100 years? We support language in the bill that pauses evaluation.

Testing

In March, when schools shut down, Ohio received a waiver suspending testing. As a teacher, my colleagues and I test our students with formative assessments that tailor our teaching to fill students' gaps. Teachers created assessments that best assess what their students know and need to know are required. Teachers can do it because that is what teachers do. These tests inform teaching and help us communicate with students and parents where their child stands. Formative assessments, such as quizzes and diagnostics, are timely and standardized tests are not. Standardized tests results are not known in real-time.

Continuing high stakes testing doesn't improve education. It only reports what we know from our flawed report card. We know students are behind, that the COVID-19 slide is real. Standardized tests will only reinforce that and take time away from our effort to catch students up. We support the waiver request for testing and not having a report card sanctions for this school year.

Some people may feel that without testing we will not teach or give it our all. Those people are wrong. The efforts of my fellow teachers during our virtual learning this spring prove that belief wrong. We made every effort to contact students and parents. As I said earlier, we worked 24/7 servings as IT expert, teacher, counselor, food provider, and teacher to our children. I work hard, but I have never worked this hard.

With a hold on teacher evaluations and state testing in the spring, teachers worked harder than ever. They didn't need a state test or an evaluation cycle to make that happen. Teachers will continue that hard work for their students because that is what teachers do. This concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions you may have.