

Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee - thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Substitute House Bill 67.

My name is Darrell Edwards and I am the superintendent of Goshen Local Schools in Clermont County in Southwest Ohio. I am here today in support of HB67 and reinstating the emergency clause of the bill.

Goshen Local Schools serves almost 2,900 students in our four schools. We started the school year with one mission in mind: our goal was to return students day one of the school year to in person, face to face learning. We believe that students learn best while in a school building under the caring guidance and instruction of loving teachers. We believe that parents need us to be open at school so that they can work. Over 50% of our students are economically disadvantaged and we know getting lunch and support at school are important.

We also know that some students and their families needed another option for physical or mental health reasons so we created an online learning platform. Administrators worked long hours every day last summer to devise a plan. We spared no money, no time, no effort in coming up with a plan. Hand sanitizers, HVAC improvements, extra teachers hired to provide online instruction, extra cleaning personnel, laptops for every kid...you name it.

It has been a challenging year. Here are some of the statistics that show how challenging of year it has been:

- Goshen Local Schools has a little over 300 full or part time employees or contracted services employees that serve our children. For a four week period of time we averaged 36 employees out every day having contracted COVID or being a close contact of another individual such as a spouse. We juggled staff members, teachers taught from home and we stayed open. We have had 86 employees contract COVID primarily from outside the school contact. We have had a total of 292 employee quarantines.
- Goshen Local Schools have had 137 students contract COVID. We have had 2,023 student quarantines. If we take that times 10 school days for a quarantine which is the maximum days one could be, that is 20,230 school days students have missed. Our school year has 174 student days this year—those missed days are like over 116 students missing an entire school year for COVID only.
- Students have been given online lessons to make up for those days. They have been video conferenced into class. We have done everything we could to make up for the lost learning but still it is a challenge.
- Hours of instruction have been lost by having to extend lunch periods to provide safe distancing at lunch and teaching students new procedures.

And in spite of all of these challenges.....we have been open every day at our two elementary schools and have only had 3 days of remote learning at the middle and high schools due to lack of staffing. In spite of what we see in the news in some districts, our teachers and staff came back to school scared to death of COVID but doubly determined to make a difference with kids. They never complained, they just came back to make a difference.

I appreciate the efforts of the original authors of HB 67 to eliminate testing for the 2021 school year. This would have permitted schools to focus on instruction and catching students up. Quite frankly we give enough local and vendor assessments throughout the year to determine where our students are and how to intervene now. We do not need the state tests to do so as the data comes in in June and is a little late to do anything with. Unfortunately those efforts were derailed by the refusal of the U.S. Department of Education to consider testing waivers for this year.

With that being said, I support House Bill 67 and it's provisions to:

- Waive the administration of the state-required American History end-of-course exam for the 2020-2021 school year
- Expand the window for spring assessments
- Move the deadline for ODE to report data from the school report cards from Sept. 15th to Oct. 14th
- Permits students to use final course grades in lieu of end-of-course exam scores for meeting graduation requirements for school years 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024
- Provide the same graduation flexibility as permitted for the previous school year through HB 197

Our seniors have been in school and we have spared no efforts to get them to graduate. Most of Goshen's students will make it through. I am up here for the few that might not and the rest of the students in Ohio that need flexibility due some of the challenges they have faced. What are some of those?

- Students that are engaged in online learning due to mental or physical health conditions of them or their families that while it is still learning, does not equal what happens inside of a school building.
- Students missing face to face intervention opportunities to help them to earn graduation points on end of course assessments.
- Students that missed opportunities to take assessments last spring.
- Students that have missed opportunities to earn alternative pathways such as graduation seals.
- Students that have missed massive amounts of school days due to being quarantined or having COVID.
- Students that have faced mental health issues that are greater due to the pandemic.

I also urge you to reinstitute the emergency clause in the bill. Graduation is in May for almost all Ohio students. This is simple common sense.

Thank you for your time and consideration and efforts on behalf of Ohio's citizens and their children.