



**Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
HB 67 Proponent Testimony
Presented by Darold Johnson,
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March 9, 2021**

Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor and Committee members. I am Darold Johnson of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). OFT represents 20,000 teachers and paraprofessionals in rural and urban school districts, higher education faculty, and public employees. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB 67.

I want to start by thanking the House for their work on HB 67. Our members truly appreciate that legislators recognize the needs of students, parents, and educators during this challenging year for education.

As you know, education has continued through a variety of modes this year – from fully remote to hybrid to fully in-person instruction. Currently the vast majority of all students are receiving hybrid or fully in-person instruction. However, even in the best circumstances, learning has been disrupted due to quarantines, shifting modes of instruction, and illness. Ohio’s students should not be further harmed by a rigid insistence on pre-pandemic requirements.

We urge you to pass HB 67 and to ensure that it contains the emergency clause so that it can be applied as intended, for the end of this school year.

Students, parents, administrators and educators agree that we need flexibility on graduation requirements this year so that students who are ready to graduate have that opportunity. We support HB 67 because it allows the use of course grades to demonstrate competency rather than end-of-course exams. Teachers are in the best position to know whether their students are graduation ready.

HB 67 will scale down our testing requirements to the federally mandated minimum and expand the spring testing window. These changes are needed to give educators and students the flexibility they need as this year wraps up. HB 67 will also require the state superintendent to apply for an accountability waiver. This waiver would ensure that school districts that have been most impacted by the negative effects of the pandemic are not punished for circumstances that have been outside of their control.

Heather Stambaugh, an American Studies teacher at Greenon schools, recently said in an interview, "Frequently one of the greatest mistakes made is assuming testing and evaluations is the pinnacle of accountability for teachers. This is false. Our accountability looks us in the eyes every single day. Our accountability meets us at conferences. In a small town, it's educating the children of our friends and neighbors. Creating caring, thoughtful, critical thinkers is our accountability and it is what every teacher is still working towards, whether attending face to face, hybrid, or virtual." Heather has spent the year in on-going conversations with parents about how their children are doing based on the formative assessments she gives in real-time.

We know that the federal government has not offered waivers as they did last year, but several states have applied for a waiver. Ohio should add its name to the list of states seeking the waiver. We hope that this bill and other states' efforts to seek waivers will result in the U.S. Department of Education granting waivers under the leadership of Secretary Miguel Cardona.

HB 67 will provide needed help to the Class of 2021. This class has lost its junior and senior years. Many of them have seen family members get sick or lose income due to the pandemic. These students deserve every opportunity to succeed. The graduation flexibility in this bill is essential, because the lack of a diploma could stop students in their tracks.

We support SBOE member Dr. Christina Collins's call to add language in this bill allowing the [Ohio Means Jobs Readiness Graduation Seal](#) serve as a method of obtaining a high school diploma. The Seal looks comprehensively at the skills needed to enter the workforce.

We urge you to move HB 67 quickly and restore the emergency clause. This concludes my testimony, and I welcome any questions you may have.