

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 opponent testimony on Senate Bill (SB 145), which would make revisions to Ohio's School Report Card. I am Todd Bowling, Superintendent of Northwest Local Schools, In Hamilton County Ohio.

I would like to address two issues today that I think are unfair with SB 145 and outline how it affects the students and stakeholders of the Northwest Local School District. The two issues I will address are SB 145 maintains the letter grade system (though there is talk of going to a 3-star or 5-star system), and SB 145 changes "gap closing" to "equity" (this is not an equity measure and there are many issues of inequity with the report card; changing the title doesn't change the reality).

The reality of a letter grade system for our district is it is used by the media and local realtors as a punishment. I have been in education for 33 years and have found through numerous conversations with happy and angry parents that their perceptions of a school or district is often related to their experiences they went through while in school themselves. Different cultures and especially those from poverty did not have the same experiences as others while in school and have experienced failure denoted by letter grades and association with punishments by parents, grandparents and sometimes foster parents as they made their way through the system. Letter grades for a school district's report card do not show the hard work that each and every employee is putting forth from the transportation departments providing safe transportation to and from school; cafeteria employees providing the only two warm meals our students get every day, as 70% of our students are on free/reduced lunch; our school nurses providing care daily; custodians providing a clean and warm environment that most don't experience at home; and lastly, teachers who not only provide a top notch education but provide social and emotional support on a daily basis while providing school supplies for those who cannot afford them - clothing for students, shoes, jackets, backpacks, and anything else that is needed.

We have two high schools, three middle schools and five elementary schools in our district with 8,680 students, 31.4% African American, 16.7% Students with Disabilities, 46.3% white, and 1200 employees. Our population is very transient at about a rate of 13%. So in any given year for example, at Colerain High School we have 247 students enrolling and un-enrolling each year. However, our report card grades do not take into account that these kids come to us credit deficient or behind when they enroll. If you look at that district wide every year 1,170 students are transferring in and out. We don't have open enrollment due to lack of capacity in our buildings. Our end reward is that a grade is then posted on a realtor website, a letter grade that

in no way reflects what all we do for students, what we provide and in no way can ever show how much love, support and care we provide everyday in a lot of different ways. We are the best 7 hours some of our kids have every day. A letter grade is a slap in a face. Now there is talk of a star system, is that due to someone's ego that feels the need to hold schools accountable by slapping more stars on us? Really? Are the stars going to show the mobility rate of our students? The amount of money spent per pupil? We beat ourselves down daily, listening to the tragic stories our kids have to deal with and we hold ourselves to high accountability levels. There does need to be accountability, but not in the form of grades and stars that people relate to a failing grade and have previous experiences with. A school is only as good as the stakeholders who make up the community. It takes all stakeholders working together to make sure every child is successful, and that is not equal in each district. The current report card does nothing more than confuse parents as they don't understand the metrics used to calculate or come up with the grades. Instead of informing it divides communities and makes a stronger case for the haves and have nots.

The second issue is changing "Gap Closing" to "Equity." To begin, gap closing causes huge problems with my African American parents. They despise terms like subgroups as it demoralizes or puts down African American groups, IEP students, ESL groups and any group with "subgroup" as a label. Chris Miller, an outstanding community member and an employee and leader at The National Underground Railroad Center in Cincinnati is a voice in our community and our city who strongly opposes this language and is offended by what it stands for. By changing it to equity does this mean the funding formula that has been found unconstitutional for the past 30 years will change? Our district just passed a 7.2 mill levy one year ago and we still have the lowest per pupil expenditure in Hamilton County, around \$7800 per student. Our community does not want more levies. The state sits on surplus funds and wants equity while surrounding districts spend \$10,000-\$11,000 per student and you want to give us a grade and say this is equity. Have you really thought this out? You want equity so you offer EdChoice. The only students who take EdChoice in our district are white students who want a free parochial education. Our African American population feels a part of our schools, feels cared for, and most importantly, are a part of something. Is this another example of your equity? If we want to truly close gaps we need level playing fields. We have a great community with outstanding teachers and staff. Our students are awesome, and some need more encouragement than others, but their hopes and dreams do not need to be damaged by being shunned by a school or district report card that shows a letter grade because their family cannot afford to live in another district that spends more per pupil, and families look different than what theirs look like. Please work with us and do not dictate to us what we should have. We have been in this business a long time. We hold ourselves a lot more accountable than you

think. We just want fairness and a system that does not separate the haves and have nots across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on SB 145.