



**First Ring Schools Collaborative
SB 145 Interested Party Testimony
Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee
May 6, 2021**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Primary & Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit our thoughts on the needed reforms to the State Report Card, and specifically on SB 145.

The First Ring Schools Collaborative (sometimes simply referred to as “First Ring”) is an association of 16 school districts that surround the city of Cleveland, Ohio and serving more than 100,000 students. Our group was established in 2000 as a means of collaboration for school districts facing similar challenges, with a goal of working together to overcome those challenges.

As Superintendents, we collaborate with one another to discuss best practices in advancing academic achievement, addressing the effects of student poverty on school performance, facilitating student transition, and on a variety of other topics. All this to say, our group exists to make sure our schools are the best they can *possibly* be for our students.

We are encouraged that legislators are working together to address the pitfalls of the current State Report Card. **The current system has two primary pitfalls:**

1. It is almost exclusively based on testing
2. Scores for almost every metric are easily predicted simply by looking at a building or district’s poverty level

Ohio’s State Report Card treats schools like testing factories. Our schools are so much more.

In the following pages, we provide feedback on the provisions of SB 145, some of which we support, and others which we respectfully request be amended.

At the conclusion of our testimony, we emphasize our opposition to the assignment of overall grades, and our strong objections to the provision of SB 145 which requires that more than half of all districts or schools do not earn the same letter grade in any component or overall grade.

The state report card, as many of our colleagues have testified previously, was never meant to rank Ohio schools. **Forcing all schools into a bell curve does not give parents meaningful information about their school district’s performance - it only pits school districts against one another.**

Our overall feedback is this: we appreciate several of the changes proposed, but we envision a future for Ohio’s schools wherein the State Report Card provides those who are invested in the success of our schools with a holistic understanding of what each district can offer a child.

Our member schools, and schools in all parts of the state, offer meaningfully enriching programs such as music, advanced art, robust and sophisticated supports and services for students with

special needs, proximity to and collaboration with community colleges, career and technical programming, and so much more.

While some of these programs are so renowned that they have won national awards – and more importantly, enriched student learning experiences and made them more likely to have positive associations with school – they are not reflected in the state report card.

Things like teacher retention, mandated implementation of pedagogical best-practices in the classroom, the development of partnerships with leaders in the business community, and other items are important to consider when evaluating the quality of a school.

We would respectfully request that as Senators consider reforms to the state report card, that a more sweeping set of reforms be discussed. The Ohio Department of Education has so much more information about the work of Ohio's schools that goes beyond test scores, and we would welcome a conversation about how that information could be presented to the community.

Bearing all this in mind, we have performed an extensive review of SB 145, and have several pieces of positive feedback, as well as some respectful requests for changes. For the sake of brevity, we have included only the items of greatest priority to our group below.

Achievement Component

- Overall, we support the reforms made to the Achievement metric. **We would in particular like to emphasize our support for the inclusion of science and social studies tests in the Performance Index.** The inclusion of that data provides a more holistic picture of student performance.

Progress Component

- We particularly support the elimination of the subgroup demotion.

Graduation Component

- We support reporting both four-year and five-year graduation cohort rates, and rating based on the composite 4- and 5-year graduation rate.
- It is especially helpful that HB 145 would have this section report the number of students with disabilities who did not graduate as part of their respective four-year cohort but are still receiving educational services per an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Gap Closing Component (Newly, "Equity")

- **We strongly oppose including Chronic Absenteeism in this measure**, especially if the measure is to be re-named "Equity." To be very clear, we do not oppose the reporting of student absenteeism – we simply oppose the grading of this metric. The extent to which a school leader can compel student attendance is limited. Thus, the metric does not so much reflect the quality of a school, but the social conditions of students it serves.
- **We recommend that the subgroup minimum be adjusted to 30 students**, to retain student privacy.

- We support eliminating the letter grade demotion as it relates to federal assessment participation requirements.

K-3 Literacy Component

- **We strongly recommend that K-3 literacy simply be a report of the 3rd Grade Reading Subtest.** Simplifying this measure would assist school leaders, ODE, and parents.

Prepared for Success Component

- As this metric is not a federally-mandated component of the Report Card, and as some of the data included in the expanded version of this section under HB 145 will be difficult for districts to obtain, we respectfully request it be removed.

A Note on Overall Ratings

If the purpose of the state report card is to inform parents, perhaps inspiring them to act to improve their child's school, then the data should reflect the nuance of the school's performance. An overall letter grade gives little-to-no actionable information. In fact, parents in our districts are often confused about the overall letter grade given to their child's school.

We liken this to an involved parent's review of their child's personal progress report. If the child is getting As in math and science, but failing his English class, the parent can take action – making themselves more available for homework help with essays, providing the child with lots of age-appropriate reading materials, and, if needed, enlisting the help of a tutor.

While a student GPA may tell you the success the student has had in coursework overall, it does almost nothing for an outside observer who wishes to help a struggling student succeed more. The same holds true for schools and school districts.

We concur with our colleagues from the Alliance for High Quality Education who previously testified that thoughtful movement away from the A-F overall rating system is necessary. We strongly agree with the Alliance's testimony that they, "prefer a more data-driven approach in terms of using a dashboard."

We oppose the continued issuance of overall letter grades for districts and buildings because they do not provide useful information to parents or community stakeholders.

As indicated above, we also oppose the provision of SB 145 which requires that more than half of all districts or schools do not earn the same letter grade in any component or overall grade.

Senators, we thank you for your consideration of our feedback. We look forward to working with the Committee and with our peer advocacy groups as SB 145 moves through the legislative process. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to First Ring Schools leader, Dr. Jennifer Dodd (jennifer.dodd@escneo.org).