

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 Bob Longworth, Superintendent of Lockland Local Schools.

I appreciate your willingness to address the need to change the Ohio School Report Card. As a public educator for the last 20 years in the state, the need is clear and evident to me as well.

While I appreciate all efforts to address the flaws and inequities of Ohio's current tool, SB 145 falls short of providing a fair, transparent, understandable report card for our schools, districts and communities throughout the state.

Current language within SB 145 maintains the letter grade system that is already in place. Additionally, SB 145 maintains an overall grade which takes the focus off the important components that are measured within the tool. The use of an overall grade (whether that represents an A-F label, a "star system" or other labeling mechanism) will continue to yield a single and oversimplified "label" that is neither a fair reflection of a school's performance or an accurate reflection of a school's impact for students, families and the community. While all of Ohio's schools will always perform at various levels with different measures, no school can or should be labeled with one summative statement in an effort to accurately reflect their effectiveness or worth. The strengths and challenges of schools and districts are too easily overlooked with this communication and should not be included in future considerations for an improved School Report Card.

In addition, SB 145 continues to include the Prepared for Success measure as a graded component, which is subjective in nature due to a District's inability to accurately define all pathways to success. Each community is unique and represents different values reflecting what is most important to their constituents and how they define aptitude for future success. While it is both fair and reasonable to communicate various preparedness measures to stakeholders on the Report Card, students that complete the requirements of graduation in the State of Ohio are meeting a number of criteria that indicate preparation for success post graduation. An Ohio district leader recently shared that under the Prepared for Success criteria, a total of eight recent graduates completing all high school graduation requirements *and* all criteria needed to earn an Associate's Degree at the collegiate level did *NOT* meet the Prepared for Success criteria on Ohio's School Report Card. This statement further illustrates the need to remove the graded nature of this measure on the Report Card.

SB 145 changes the terminology used from “gap closing” to “equity.” In speaking with a number of educators from across our great state, many (myself included) find this mere revision of language to be both misleading and, while I am sure unintended, disrespectful. As you have been made aware in testimony in the past, our current Report Card does not address the equity issues that are glaringly obvious in Ohio’s schools. I believe I speak for many in saying that changing the current Gap Closing measure label with the word “Equity” does not address the meaningful change that is needed in order to truly communicate needs, trends in data and next steps required to create equitable systems and structures within Ohio’s schools. While I applaud the shift in mindset that would allow for a more equitable lens to be applied to Ohio schools and districts, the language within SB 145 misses the mark in an attempt to do so.

Furthermore, SB 145 requires student subgroups to meet both achievement *and* progress targets, which is a significant equity issue for Ohio schools and districts. As an educator dedicating the last two decades of my professional career serving some of the most economically impoverished and depressed communities and families in Ohio, it is evident to me that some districts are going to struggle to show comparable achievement scores due to circumstances that are far beyond the control of the school and district. Research states the number one indicator of student growth and achievement is the quality of the teacher. It is also abundantly clear that the second indicator is and always has been poverty. Many districts are working hard to implement improved and aligned curriculum, to engage students with evidence-based instructional strategies and are focused on using assessment data to drive decisions (funding, professional development opportunities, improved access to educational resources, etc.). These schools and districts are growing students academically at a faster pace than many other schools and districts and should be acknowledged and celebrated. As a result, subgroup growth and progress targets should be heavily relied upon when evaluating the effectiveness of a school and district versus achievement rates that often communicate the economic wealth of a community and *NOT* the effectiveness of a school setting.

It is important to note that as a public educator in Ohio, I understand the need for transparency and accountability in our schools. Visibility is accountability and people both need and deserve to know what is happening within their schools. I am excited and hopeful for the day that Ohio’s School Report Card is capable of communicating the story of our schools and districts throughout the state of Ohio. After review of the proposed changes to the current model within SB 145, it is evident there is still work to be done before that becomes a reality.

There is so much more to a school or district’s narrative than what the current or proposed revisions to the State Report Card within SB 145 could ever share.

Lockland is one of the oldest and most storied districts in our state, serving students and families since 1851 in Southwest Ohio. The pride of our community is immeasurable and the school district remains the heart of our village to this day. Like many in Ohio, our district and community have experienced significant change over the last several decades. What was once a booming economic region with stability and consistency, is no longer.

Lockland Local School District is now the most transient school district in our region of the state and represents the 608th poorest school district out of Ohio's 612 districts according to the most recent U.S. Census data collection. Student mobility rates are now approaching 30% annually, nearly one quarter of all students are in the process of acquiring English as a second language and the estimated median household income is a mere \$28,542.00 versus the state average of \$61,937.00. Additionally, 100% of our students are eligible for free breakfast and lunch within our district.

I point to these statistics because there is clear and convincing evidence showing that the current Report Card metrics do little more than rank order our Ohio districts based on the income of the communities they serve. My hope for the future is to realize an accountability system that no longer does this and instead measures an accurate representation of the strengths and challenges faced for analysis and evaluation and ultimately serves as a tool for reflection and improvement. Most importantly, I hope for a report card that recognizes the significant efforts, partnerships, and priorities that will result in providing ALL students in Ohio with the tools and resources necessary to find success in life after graduation.

Despite the challenges our students and families face on a daily basis, Lockland Schools are on the rise and miracles happen within the walls of our schools and classrooms every day. Our teachers and support staff serve so many different roles in the lives of our children and their families that I could never capture or do justice to their efforts and the resulting benefits with mere words on a page. For this reason, I would welcome each of you and your colleagues to come and see the great things happening within our school community daily.

The work of teachers is that of the most essential business in our nation. It is the work that drives our state and nation's ability to do all other work, quite literally. I will never discount the work that is done in all schools, by all teachers. I also believe that it is important to understand that comparing all schools across a region or a state is not comparing apples to apples but rather apples to oranges.

The realities of many urban and rural schools are starkly different from those found within our suburban counterparts. The needs of the students we serve are significantly different due to the effects of childhood poverty, food scarcity, safety concerns, abuse,

mental health struggles, crime and countless additional adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) that are prevalent and found much more frequently in our setting than within those of more affluent or suburban districts. As you are undoubtedly aware, research has shown that these ACE's can be directly correlated with student achievement. This is the primary reason there are often significant differences between the levels of achievement within districts serving impoverished families versus those that serve the more affluent. This is also the reason our current Report Card and the proposed changes within SB 145 will only serve to continue to rank order schools and districts based on wealth. The intelligence, ability, capacity to grow and also learn is no greater or less based on the zip code of any child, however a failure to recognize that where students begin their educational journey in terms of prerequisite skills and preparedness and the impacts that will have on the amount of time and work that must be done to close gaps that exist from the onset of school would be naive.

The emotional toll that working with (and growing to love) disadvantaged and at-risk youth in urban and rural settings is also a well documented contributing factor to higher levels of teacher / staff burnout and turnover than what is typically experienced within districts of greater wealth. Many of the greatest teachers in our state and nation work within our urban and rural schools, managing miracles and changing lives under circumstances that are more challenging than most. The current Report Card and the Report Card that would result from the proposed changes within SB 145 consistently communicates failure to these same professionals that have dedicated their lives to improving circumstances and changing others lives every day.

We have worked exceedingly hard in Lockland Local Schools for the past two years to improve in ways that have and will continue to impact our students, families and community in positive ways. We have become laser focused on what is most important, including: early childhood literacy, meeting the diverse social emotional needs of our students, improving access to the tools and resources needed for our students to compete and succeed in the 21st Century, development of technology programming for all students, increased emphasis on college / career readiness and pathways and early intervention strategies to close academic gaps as early as kindergarten to ensure on-time graduation for our students.

In order to embrace this work, we have created strong partnerships with local colleges and universities, the business community, non-profit organizations, the faith based community, the local municipality and the Ohio Department of Education. We have strengthened our instruction, improved our access to resources, improved staff retention rates and improved the culture and climate of our schools. Student growth is on the rise, student discipline and disruptions are on the decline, confidence in our ability to close gaps has increased and so has the confidence of the families and community that

we serve. Unfortunately, although we are making great strides, building strong partnerships, increasing access to intervention for all students (academic, technical, emotional and physical) and showing growth in all of these areas at rates that would far exceed most others, we will continue to score and present on the State Report Card at much lower levels than many others that surround us. This only serves to perpetuate the cycles that we are working tirelessly to overcome.

For these reasons and many more, I am asking you to consider needed revisions to SB 145 prior to moving forward with this legislation. I know that you, like me, only want the best for our students, families, communities and state. While SB 145 does indicate the need for much needed changes to our state report card, it is not yet enough to make the difference that we all know is needed.

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