

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dr. Stephanie Starcher, and I am the Superintendent of Fort Frye Local Schools, Chair of the Report Card Committee for the Buckeye Association of School Administrators, and past President of the Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools that represents 116 school systems. A few weeks ago, I was here to testify in full support of HB 200, and today I am here to offer opponent testimony for Senate Bill 145.

First, as someone who has worked many years on improving the quality of Ohio's state report card system, I want to point out that HB 200 and SB 145 have a few shared recommendations. For example, both agree that each component should include a visual showing the district's or school's performance over the past three years, both would base the progress measure on the overall value added score and would give ODE the flexibility to investigate changing value added to a true gain score, both would include "report only" information under the graduation component to better tell the story of students who have not graduated yet that are still being served by the district, and both would expand the items included on the Prepared for Success component to acknowledge there are many pathways to student success. Anytime we can get two sides to come together in agreement on anything in education, we should seize that opportunity. However, there are recommendations in SB 145 that, if enacted, will still leave the state report card system very flawed and most importantly, a system that is based on punitive measures and inequities rather than continuous improve and consistent supports.

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, school systems have provided in-person, hybrid, and/or remote learning system, increased the skilled use of technology exponentially, offered mental and medical health services, provided consistent meals for students, maintained extracurricular programming, and monitored the overall well-being of Ohio's students better than any other organizations in the state. The impact and the role of our schools, now more than ever, is truly immeasurable! Yet, SB 145 suggests that we can continue to label each school system and each school in Ohio with a single overall rating based primarily on standardized assessments. If the past 14 months has not demonstrated to us that a single overall rating of a school system cannot equitably and accurately capture the effectiveness of schools, then are we are out of touch with what is happening every single day in Ohio's classrooms.

SB 145 recommends an accountability rating system based on five levels. There is supposedly discussion about proposed changes in SB 145 to move away from letter grades to a star system or some other similar system. A five-level star rating system will be equated to a letter-grade system by those wanting to rank order schools. It just takes the media one more step to change the five-star to the "A", the four-

star to the “B,” and so on. Let’s truly make a complete shift away from the inappropriate use of letter grades for schools by noting using a system of five levels. The organizations that I am representing also adamantly oppose how SB 145 requires schools to meet both achievement and progress goals for the Equity component on the state report card. HB 200 will allow a school system to meet either progress or academic standards for reducing the performance gap for various subgroups. Students do not come to us on level playing fields. Analytical reviews of Ohio’s academic performance data, and accountability systems across the nation for that matter, clearly show that student achievement is highly correlated with socio-economic status whereas progress measures are not. Why do we insist on penalizing school systems that have many economically disadvantaged students by using both achievement AND progress for a performance gap-closing measures? Further, can we see the irony in the fact that HB 145 calls this measure “Equity” when there is no way in the world a required achievement measure in this component reflects any sort of equity. The only school systems who may benefit from the equity component as delineated in SB 145 are affluent school districts. While I am happy for these schools who have the advantage of wealth from day one with their students, I am advocating for a system that does not falsely label and punish the other 85% of schools. Districts and schools who are growing students academically should be recognized and celebrated.

The requirements of the Early Literacy measure outlined in SB 145 is another area of concern. In order for a child to be promoted to grade four, a child must achieve the promotion score on the end-of-course exam. This score is sufficient for promotion to the next grade, and therefore, should be more than satisfactory to use for a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy measure on the state report card. Moreover, as I have stated before in testimony, the calculation of off-track readers becoming on-track in grades Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is phenomenally inaccurate and a mere numbers game of overcomplicated statistics. It is not really giving an accurate portrayal of how students are progressing in early literacy so why would we want to hold schools accountable for this portion of the measure?

A final portion of SB 145 that is problematic and needs brought to your attention is the Prepared for Success component. We all want our students to be prepared for some version of success after high school, and the organizations that I represent are not advocating against post-secondary success. However, SB 145 requires Prepared for Success to be part of a weighted accountability system using criteria that are not equitable. For example, in small school systems, we do not have enough students to complete rosters for both AP and CCP classes. In many school systems, students are choosing to take CCP courses in order to complete college requirements ahead of time and save themselves and their

families money. This is understandable, but it also results in very few kids, particularly in smaller high schools, pursuing AP courses so these end up being cancelled. Thus, the state mandated that high schools offer free CCP classes, which, in turn, has led to decreased AP classes in many places and now we measure the AP enrollment in the Prepared for Success component. This is unfair to smaller school systems and schools with high poverty. I applaud the many components added to Prepared for Success in HB 145, but because the elements added will be subjective and not equitable to all districts and schools due to their circumstances, this should be a report only component. This is not federally required and serves no purpose to help districts and schools improve.

For the first-time ever, there is a lot of consensus that the state report card system measuring alleged school quality in Ohio is in need of great revision. I respectfully ask that you give considerable weight to the testimony of the people in the educational field, the experts who have been trained in the field and live the reality of public schooling every day in Ohio. During the ongoing pandemic, we have relied on the expertise of our scientists and medical practitioners so why are we not relying on our professional educators to help lead the way for report card legislation? I respectfully ask that you investigate how many educational organizations helped to write SB 145. Educator understands the challenges we face every day and the work we do to help each and every student find success in the midst of those challenges, and the organizations affiliated with educators and school systems are not here today in support SB 145. It is not because they are demanding lower standards, but because they are adamant that SB 145 does not move us far enough away from our currently flawed state report card system. Finally, some business leaders are suggesting that SB 145 holds schools more accountable for graduating more job-ready students. When I hear this, I have to chuckle at the irony. State report cards and complex accountability systems were introduced over a decade ago to ensure that public schools were preparing our kiddos for the future. After all the years of testing and measuring student academic performance in countless ways, we are still being told how ill-equipped our graduates are for post-secondary life, perhaps at the worst levels ever. It is obvious that the correlation of ridiculous accountability mechanisms does not equate to a better work force or citizenry.

Again, thank you for allowing me to speak, and I hope you will not settle for continuation of the status quo or HB 145. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.

