



Thank you, Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee members for giving me the opportunity to provide proponent testimony today on Senate Bill 145.

My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The Fordham Institute is an education-focused nonprofit that conducts research, analysis, and policy advocacy with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C.

I'd like to start by commending the bill sponsor and the committee for tackling this important and incredibly complex issue. School and district report cards perform a variety of critical functions. For parents, the report cards offer objective information as they search for schools that can help their children grow academically and reach their potential. For citizens, they remain an important check on whether their schools are thriving and contributing to the well-being of their community. For governing authorities, such as school boards and charter sponsors, the report card shines a light on the strengths and weaknesses of the schools they are responsible for overseeing. And, finally, as we are reminded during challenging times like this, it can help public officials identify schools in need of extra help and resources.

Because of the many roles it plays, it's essential that Ohio get it right when designing a report card. The current report card has some important strengths and has even drawn national praise from the Data Quality Campaign and the Education Commission of the States. Nevertheless, there are facets of the report card that can and should be improved. Fordham published a report in 2017, [Back to the Basics](#), calling for a variety of reforms to Ohio's report card framework including simplifying it and making it fairer to schools serving high percentages of economically disadvantaged students.

As you consider how to improve the report card, we urge you to keep four principle-based questions at the forefront.

1. Does the report card support equity and ensure high expectations for all students and that each student counts?
2. Does the report card advance transparency and offer parents and communities clear, simple, honest information about school performance?
3. Is the report card fair and does it give every school the opportunity to demonstrate growth and improvement?
4. Is the report card accurate and ensure components are measuring what is intended?

SB 145 significantly reworks the state report card framework. What follows is a summary of the most important changes with a short analysis of how they adhere to the principles that I've described.

- **Switching to a star rating system:** While Fordham remains a fan of the simplicity and transparency inherent in using A to F grades, we recognize that a state system that views a “C” as average performance creates a disconnect for families that often view a “C” on a student’s report card as a time to intervene. For that reason alone, a shift makes sense. The adoption of a 5-star framework is an excellent alternative. It benefits from being widely used to rate preschools, hospitals, and even products and services on Amazon and Yelp. This is a huge advantage when compared to text-based descriptors that can be either misleading or hard to understand in districts like Columbus where families speak dozens of languages. A 5-star rating system is simple and maintains transparency.
- **Maintaining, but modifying, the overall rating:** Akin to a GPA, an overall rating offers a broad sense of performance by combining results from disparate report card measures. It focuses public attention on the general academic quality of a school contributing to both transparency and fairness. In contrast, a system without a final rating risks misinterpretation. It enables users to “cherry pick” high or low component ratings that, when considered in isolation, could misrepresent the broader performance of a school. SB 145 goes a step farther to increase the usefulness of overall grades by ensuring that student growth—a measure fairest to high poverty schools—will never be less than 25 percent of a school or district’s overall grade. It also introduces half-stars to provide for greater differentiation in the overall ratings.
- **Reducing the number of graded components:** Simplicity when presenting ratings is critical for a report card to be useful. Report cards for school districts currently have 15 different grades. When you grade too many things, you diminish the value and usefulness of every measure. SB 145 slashes the number of graded measures to six components and one overall grade.
- **Adding context to every graded measure:** While already using a well understood 5-star rating system, SB 145 goes a step further to add even more context to the ratings. It calls for the inclusion of text descriptions to supplement rather than supplant the star system, colors to add clarity so that a 3-star rating will be shaded green helping to ensure communities understand it represents acceptable performance and doesn’t come with a negative connotation, and trend arrows to show within a component if a school’s performance is improving or declining. These changes will make the report fairer and more accurate by increasing the context around the ratings.

The changes just described focused on the overall report card framework. Next, I’ll dive into some of the changes surrounding the individual report card components. These are critical improvements, because poorly structured components feed into the overall rating and harm public confidence in the report card.

- **Streamlining the achievement measure:** SB 145 eliminates the indicators met component and bases the rating solely on performance index. This simplifies the measure and contributes to equity because the performance index doesn’t just give a school credit when a student “passes”

a state assessment but also when students achieve above and beyond the proficiency mark. It properly keeps the focus on every student reaching his or her potential. Some have advocated for a sixth category under performance index. We oppose doing that. It would ruin long-term comparability and could require increasing the length of state assessments.

- **Changing value-added (student growth):** SB 145 makes a couple of changes to the value-added component that should increase fairness. First, it shifts to a 3-year weighted average when calculating growth which ensures that one bad year won't sink a school's rating. It also eliminates the current demotion when one individual student group doesn't perform well. Importantly, performance of student groups will still impact a school's rating but will be a part of the equity measure.
- **Adds additional data around graduation ratings:** The bill doesn't make major changes to the graduation rate component as its structure is generally locked-in by federal requirements. It does provide additional context by disclosing how many students with disabilities are continuing their K-12 education—consistent with law that allows them to remain a student until age 22.
- **Shifting from gap closing to equity:** SB 145 reworks the component known as gap closing and renames it equity. The current gap closing component allows schools to earn credit when a student group hits either performance index *or* value-added goals. This creates a very real risk that the academic performance of a student group could be hidden and the group won't get the supports and resources it deserves to make strong academic progress. The equity component under SB 145 requires that both achievement *and* growth for each student group, not one or the other, are factored into the rating. This will enhance the overall focus on equity in the system.
- **Restructuring the Early Literacy measure:** At-Risk K-3 Readers, the current early literacy component, is one of the most criticized elements of the current report card. It focuses solely on the percent of a school's struggling readers that it helps to catch up. This opens the door for situations where 90 percent of a school's students read on grade level, but the school receives a low rating for helping its struggling readers. SB 145 tackles this issue by basing half of a school's rating on the critical task of helping struggling readers to make progress. The other half though is based on the percent of third graders who demonstrate reading proficiency. By considering both improvement and overall performance, the new early literacy measure is fairer to all schools and supports equity by maintaining an emphasis on the importance of all students learning to read. This committee has heard calls for this measure to be based on the promotion rate associated with the third-grade reading guarantee. That would be a huge step backward. Ohio currently has a third-grade promotion rate of 95 percent but a proficiency rate on the third-grade reading assessment of only 67 percent. Success must continue to focus on third-graders reading on grade level. The measure in SB 145 does just that.
- **Overhauling prepared for success:** Early literacy may be criticized, but many in the education community despise the prepared for success component. Their concerns are not unfounded:

The measure was constructed too narrowly and had an overly ambitious—perhaps even unrealistic—grading scale attached to it. That being said, it's probably the most important measure on the state report card. It looks beyond state test scores—something we'd all like to do—to determine how ready young adults are when they leave high school. For transparency and accuracy purposes, this component should be reformed. But it shouldn't be abandoned. SB 145 does just that. It eliminates the current two-tier bonus structure, greatly expands the ways students can demonstrate readiness for college and career, and gives credit to schools and districts for year-to-year improvement. The new measure will be fairer to schools, especially those with low baseline readiness rates, while also supporting equity by maintaining high expectations for all students.

Through its adherence to the principles of equity, transparency, fairness, and accuracy, SB 145 would create a state report card that reinforces a key tenet of education policy. Namely, that all students—given the proper support—can learn and achieve at high levels. We urge this committee to support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.