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The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

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Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

SB 145 – Report Cards

Interested Party Testimony – May 11, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is Jeff Wensing and I am the Vice President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf the approximately 120,000 member educators of the OEA, thank you for the opportunity to provide Interested Party testimony on SB 145.

OEA welcomes and appreciates the work of the bill sponsor and others in developing the SB 145 proposal. The report card proposals in SB 145 and HB 200 demonstrate broad consensus that it is time to make significant and meaningful changes to the state report card that are in the interest of students, families, and communities.

OEA looks forward to working with legislators and all stakeholders to create a report card system that provides more accurate and understandable information, creates more focus on student opportunity indicators, and reorients the use of data to support continuous improvement instead of punishment.

OEA is not afraid of accountability, but the standardized tests and algebraic contortions that drive today's report card system do not fairly reflect the work of Ohio's students, educators, administrators, elected school board members, families, and communities. Letter grades have been misleading and unfair to everyone. And when combined with the punitive measures throughout the state's so-called accountability system, the current report card has been particularly stacked against low-income students, families, and communities. It is time for significant change.

The various report card changes proposed in SB 145 recognize the need for a significant shift in the design and purpose of Ohio's report card system. OEA recognizes the bill makes improvements in various areas of the report card and concurs with the bill sponsor's intent to make changes to the report card system that reflect what a district is doing in a positive light, as well as reflect incremental improvement or regression, while also trying not to label a district in such a way that might cause it to lose or gain good teaching talent.

OEA believes the guiding principles for improving the report card should include designing a system that is fair, informative, and transparent. Major priorities of the OEA include eliminating misleading letter grades, ending the use of overall grades (which are inherently over-simplified), and adding a

Student Opportunity Profile that allows schools to provide report-only data for equity and access indicators that can be plainly understood by all users of the report card, including parents, the public, and policy makers.

With regard to letter grades, OEA recognizes the important shift in SB 145 to eliminate A-F measures. However, OEA supports the overall approach taken by HB 200 to replace letter grades with six descriptive measures for graded categories and eliminate the use of an overall grade.

OEA believes six descriptive measures are an effective gauge of incremental performance and descriptive measures are the most informative way to provide feedback to the public and guide policy makers. For example, the lowest rating under HB 200 is “In need of support,” which clarifies for the public, policy makers, and other stakeholders that legislative intent is to use the report card to find ways to support the lowest rated districts (and hopefully all districts), not to find ways punish them.

OEA also supports eliminating overall district grades, which are an inherent over-simplification of complex organizations, and therefore more likely to mislead than inform. Overall letter grades have been used to pit one district against another and punish school districts, not as an instrument for supporting students or schools.

OEA recommends the addition a Student Opportunity Profile to the report card. This proposal is conceived as consistent with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirement that state report cards include Opportunity Dashboard data. OEA believes the state report card should have a significant and meaningful focus on student opportunity indicators to get at the real issues of equity and access.

While any list of opportunity indicators should remain flexible, OEA recommends opportunity indicators such as the ratio of teachers and instructional support professionals to students (including teachers, school nurses, school social workers, mental health professionals, classroom aide paraprofessionals, librarians and library media specialists), access and participation in support programs like free breakfast, higher level academic programming, enrichment curriculum like music and the arts, extracurricular activities, school transportation, and technology.

These kinds of student opportunity indicators, clearly and effectively presented, allow schools to demonstrate all they are doing for students beyond producing test scores later dissected and reconfigured in ways that are difficult to understand and apply meaning, especially for parents.

In closing, OEA is ultimately guided in its feedback by the OEA Report Card Proposal adopted by district leaders at the OEA Representative Assembly in 2019. This OEA proposal was submitted to the Report Card Study Committee of the 133rd Ohio General Assembly and included in the summary of recommendations receive by the committee. OEA thanks the committee for its work. While recognizing positive elements of SB 145, the HB 200 proposal most aligns to the OEA Report Card Proposal and has the OEA’s support.

OEA looks forward to participating in the ongoing legislative process to develop the best fixes for Ohio’s broken report card system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am available for any questions.