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*Mission: Each student is highly educated, prepared for leadership and service, and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community.*

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**Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**Sub. SB 145 Proponent Testimony**  
**May 25, 2021**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Sub. SB 145, which is intended to reform Ohio's current accountability system, also known as the state report card. I am Dr. Erik Roush, and I handle policy and government affairs for Columbus City Schools.

As you have heard throughout the various days of testimony on this bill, there appears to be broad consensus in the need to overhaul the existing system. Where there appears to be disagreement is on the means to which we achieve that result. Our district is no different in that we certainly believe that the current system is flawed, and we believe that many of the efforts set forth in Sub. SB 145 will lead to an improved accountability schema.

It is important to note that there are limitations upon what we as a state may do under federal law. The system must be able to meaningfully differentiate between schools. It must include metrics for achievement, growth (or progress), graduation, and how English learners are progressing. It must also maintain at least one indicator of school quality or success. I note these items not to stifle discussion or debate but to ensure that we all know the minimum starting point from which we proceed.

I applaud the elimination of the Indicators Met as a graded measure. While the information may certainly be found to be useful, it essentially served to doubly penalize schools and districts who do not reach the 80 percent threshold – hit first on the Performance Index (PI) and then again on the Indicators Met criterion. This shift is welcome.

I am glad to see both the four-year and five-year graduation rates are maintained in the calculation of the overall graduation rate as it is more important that students find their way to commencement even if it takes an extra year. I am also supportive of reporting those students who continue to receive services under their individual education plans (IEPs) beyond the typical graduation thresholds. This allows us to demonstrate our commitment to what is in the best interest of students while also providing a data point to explain why our graduation rate is lower than it could be. I would also note that this could be a good opportunity to approach the federal government to revise how they account for students within the graduation cohorts as we are limited to this reporting mechanism due to federal requirements.

I maintain that it is important that when viewing progress, we look at more than a single data-point. The three-year weighted average of this component recognizes that a trend is not established in a single year – either positive or negative. This should diminish severe swings in either direction while still maintaining the meaningful differentiation required under federal law.

The Prepared for Success measure should be re-named to better reflect what it is designed to measure – namely, college and career readiness. As a metric that is not federally required, it is not necessary to provide it as a rated measure. Given the fact that it includes language ensuring that no school or district will fall below three stars provided that it continues on a positive trajectory, I would be amenable to rating the measure, especially since the bill provides time for the Department of Education to properly scale the metric.

This brings me to a final point that has generated a great deal of discussion. I am supportive of the use of stars in the rating system. In a district where over 90 different languages are spoken, where some individuals may benefit from a non-verbal rating mechanism, we believe that stars provide a sound approach. Stars are a well-known mechanism, used by businesses and services in a variety of sectors, including the State's own Step Up to Quality. Rather than numbers or letter grades – upon which individuals automatically attribute a 0-100 scale due to past experience and conceptualization – the use of stars provides a clean slate upon which to base the accountability system while addressing the challenges listed above. It is important, though, that we not approach stars as a monolithic solution – the inclusion of descriptors, colors, and trend lines will all help to provide greater context to the stars and, hopefully, generate greater curiosity and conversation around their meaning.

Is the system set forth in SB 145 perfect? No, but it is certainly a vast improvement over the current mechanism, and I would argue that one would be hard pressed to find an accountability system that provided such perfection. It provides a sound system aligned with federal law. It more fairly identifies those schools in greatest need of additional resources while removing the discouraging nomenclature of failure. It is a move away from a system most everyone agrees is flawed towards a better, clearer, more understandable system. I am confident that my colleagues throughout education will continue to lend their voices to this debate to constructively continue to improve upon the concepts set forth in SB 145. I look forward to that conversation with them and with all of you in the weeks ahead.

Thank you.