Dec. 6, 2017
Senate Education Committee
SB 216
Interested Party

Good afternoon Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes and Committee Members. My name is Sue Koverman. I am the manager of the Early Education & Extended Learning in the Archdioceses of Cincinnati.

In the 19 counties served by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 90 Catholic elementary schools currently provide preschool programs to 1,986 students and kindergarten to 2,975 students. Because the Catholic Schools Office is not a traditional school system, but rather a "system of schools," individual schools make their own decisions about which assessments to use in areas not mandated by law. That includes preschool and kindergarten. Over the years, many programs developed their own assessments. There was little interaction between parochial and public programs. Neither really understood how the other operated, even though they both served young children and families in the same communities. As a result, there was no common assessment database related to Ohio's preschool and kindergarten readiness. If ODE was reporting the percentage of students who were "ready for kindergarten," in any given year, that number did not include students in Ohio's parochial schools.

This inconsistency was also a problem for community-based funders as they attempted to determine the most effective return on their investments. While individual donors and foundations in all communities appreciated the importance and value of investing in early childhood programs, it was challenging to evaluate the actual return on those investments because there was no common assessment for both parochial and public schools.

This isolation began to shift in 2005, as several long-awaited initiatives began to impact the quality of Ohio's early learning and kindergarten readiness measures. The first of these, *Step Up to Quality,* was not initially open to Catholic preschools. Schools were welcome to adopt the tiered standards internally, but they were not invited to participate in the actual rating process until 2017. The exception to that practice was any program that had received the ODE Early Childhood Expansion Grant. Those programs were then mandated to register for *SUTQ* and be trained in the *Early Learning Assessment (ELA).*

At the same time, Hamilton and Montgomery counties each launched community-wide cradle-to-career initiatives (*STRIVE and Learn to Earn*). While the Catholic Schools Office staff participated in both projects, we began to have a better understanding of some of the barriers that existed to developing an accurate, comprehensive view of the challenges facing kindergarten readiness in each community. Very basically, our schools were not using the same assessments as the public schools – not because we didn't WANT to use them, but because we did not have access to them. There was no way to collect data on approximately 1,000 students in each county.

In 2014, CSO staff, the Catholic Conference of Ohio and Dr. Tom Lasley, Executive Director of *Learn to Earn Dayton*, met with Senator Peggy Lehner and ODE leadership at the University of Dayton to discuss the challenges/benefits of making both the ELA

and newly-revised KRA available to non-public programs. All parties understood the importance of including assessment data for several thousand additional children in the overall state report card, but the funding for training and implementation was not in the state budget. As Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Senator Lehner said that she would take this issue back to the Committee.

In November 2016, voters in both Cincinnati and Dayton passed income and property tax initiatives to provide high quality preschool experiences for all four year olds. Preschools who wish to be **Preschool Promise** partners, must have at least a 3 Star SUTQ rating. How could Catholic preschools participate if we couldn't access the ELA and KRA?

In December 2016, our schools received the following good news -

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment – Any chartered nonpublic school with a kindergarten program may elect to administer the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, beginning in the 2018-2019 school year. Participating schools shall meet the following conditions:
--Notify the State Superintendent of Public Instruction no later than March 31 prior to any school year in which the school will administer the assessment, which will be provided by the ODE at no cost to the school;
--Agree to share each student's assessment data with the ODE. Each participating student will be assigned a data verification code (Statewide Student Identifier Number), which is the same code assigned to state-sponsored scholarship students;
--Ensure that a kindergarten teacher working under a nontax certificate either has been trained by the ODE or has been trained by another person who has completed such training, or order to administer the assessment. Effective for the 2018-2019 school year.

Given this information, the Cincinnati Catholic Schools Office launched a campaign to encourage its 60 licensed preschools to begin the SUTQ process in order to support both the Cincinnati and Dayton **Preschool Promise** initiatives. As a result of those efforts, dozens of   Catholic school preschool and kindergarten teachers have attended ELA and KRA trainings where they meet and collaborate with public school teachers to share best practices. Ohio's young children and their families are truly the beneficiaries of this evolving process. ODE works directly with classroom teachers to continue to fine tune the assessment tools and the reporting process to keep them developmentally appropriate for children and user-friendly for teachers.

For those practitioners who have spent their entire careers advocating on behalf of Ohio's young children and families, it is fulfilling to see the current status of early childhood education, and exciting to imagine the impact it will have on their futures. With that vision in mind, I ask that you continue to support both the ELA and KRA as we work together to align Ohio's educational outcomes.

Thank you.