

Senate Education Committee
Testimony on Eliminating the KRA as part of Senate Bill 216
December 13, 2017

Submitted as an Interested Party by:
Scott Emery, Director of Elementary Education, New Albany-Plain Local Schools

I would like to express my gratitude to Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee for the opportunity to share my views about the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).

My position is the KRA should not be a mandated assessment for all of Ohio's public kindergarten students, but rather its use should follow Maryland's model, where the Maryland General Assembly voted unanimously (House 141-0, Senate 46-0) in April 2016 to only require a sampling of the KRA from all districts while allowing an option for full administration in districts that find instructional value in its results.

I had the opportunity to discuss my position with Senator Lehner on April 19, 2016, and I was very appreciative of her interest and engagement in this topic. I am grateful to now have the opportunity to present my written statement to the full committee.

I am the Director of Elementary Education for the New Albany-Plain Local School District in Franklin County. This is my 26th year as a public educator in Ohio, and my 21st year as an administrator, including serving as an elementary principal for the Dublin City Schools, Granville Exempted Village Schools, Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools, as well as my current district, New Albany-Plain Local Schools.

Please know that I am not against the use of assessments with kindergarten students. I am strongly in favor of high quality assessments that provide actionable information about children to their teachers. To assist the Ohio Department of Education in this regard, I allowed my school to serve as a test site in April 2013 as ODE was exploring a comprehensive replacement for the former statewide kindergarten assessment (KRA-L). I provided detailed recommendations and offered my school as a pilot for the much needed revisions to the original 2014 version of KRA, and I opened up my school as a training site for the revised version of the KRA in 2015. I also met with the ODE Director and Assistant Director of the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness on February 2, 2016 to discuss suggested improvements to the KRA. I believe I have worked in good faith to promote the success of the KRA.

My primary concern after several years of experience with the KRA is the information the KRA provides to kindergarten teachers does not justify the time it takes teachers to administer the assessment. My kindergarten staff participated in a research study conducted by the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy at The Ohio State University that was based on

the 2014 version of KRA. The chart below illustrates the low percentage of kindergarten teachers who used the KRA data to inform instruction.

Table 1
Percent of Teachers Who Reported Using Data from the Different Domains of the KRA to Inform Instruction

USE OF KRA DATA	PHYSICAL/MOTOR	LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	MATH	SCIENCE	SOCIAL STUDIES	SOCIAL SKILLS
Planning	8%	31%	23%	3%	3%	16%
During teaching	6%	40%	6%	5%	6%	14%
Working with individual students	4%	33%	4%	5%	4%	21%

[source: https://earlychildhood.ehe.osu.edu/files/2016/04/whitepaper_KRA_aug31_web-1.pdf]

While the state made efforts to decrease the time to administer the KRA in 2015 based on teacher feedback, the revised KRA didn't make a significant difference in teacher beliefs about the usefulness of the data in making instructional decisions. According to a follow up study by the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy at The Ohio State University released in July 2017, a low percentage of the 841 Ohio kindergarten teachers who participated in the survey shared they used the data from the revised KRA to inform instruction.

		PHYSICAL/MOTOR	LANGUAGE & LITERACY	MATH	SCIENCE	SOCIAL STUDIES	SOCIAL SKILLS
Planning	Year 2	10%	33%	30%	6%	6%	16%
	Year 1	7%	33%	26%	4%	4%	16%
Teaching	Year 2	9%	26%	24%	5%	5%	13%
	Year 1	6%	25%	18%	5%	4%	10%
Working with Individual students	Year 2	13%	39%	34%	5%	5%	18%
	Year 1	11%	33%	27%	5%	4%	19%

[source: <https://earlychildhood.ehe.osu.edu/files/2017/06/KRA-2-whitepaper.pdf>]

These findings are consistent with a survey conducted by the Ohio Association of Elementary School Principals. I recommended to the Assistant Director of ODE's Office of Early Learning and School Readiness in September 2015 that a survey should be conducted of teachers and principals for feedback regarding the 2015 revised version of KRA due to ongoing concerns I had with the usefulness of the assessment. When I didn't receive a confirmation that feedback would be sought, I approached the Ohio Association of Elementary School Principals, who

developed their own survey which was administered in November 2015. In response to the question, “Does the new 2015 KRA provide you with the data you need to accurately assess your students and inform instruction?”, only 34% of the 170 respondents answered in the affirmative.

[source: <https://goo.gl/uXdHBB>]

On January 6, 2016, I received an email from ODE signed by the “The KRA Team” that a survey would be sent the following week for teachers and principals. I have not seen the results of that survey, and I would encourage this committee to request from ODE the full and unedited responses to determine if the replies support or rebut the findings of the OSU Crane Center and the OAESA.

My second concern with the KRA is its required use by all public school kindergarten students in order to inform decisions by policymakers. I don’t believe a 100% sample size of over 100,000 kindergarten students annually is needed to make informed decisions of the effectiveness of Ohio’s preschool programs and Ohio’s children’s level of kindergarten readiness.

I ask for the committee to explore the approach taken in Maryland, which was Ohio’s partner state in the development of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment based on the federal Race to the Top Early Learning Grants received by the two states in 2011. Due to concerns of the amount of time the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment takes to administer, both chambers of the Maryland General Assembly voted unanimously in 2016 to only administer the KRA to a representative sample of students while still allowing districts the opportunity to use the KRA with all students. Maryland’s districts are afforded local control by choosing either the “Census Administration” or the “Randomized Sample Administration” option.

[source: <https://www.readyatfive.org/school-readiness-data/readiness-matters-2017/1302-maryland-s-2016-2017-kindergarten-readiness-assessment-report-executive-summary/file.html>]

[source: <http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?pid=billpage&stab=02&id=HB0657&tab=subject3&ys=2016RS>]

If given the choice, I would prefer the KRA not be administered to the students I serve since I do not believe it provides value to the students’ educational experience when compared to the assessments we already use and trust in the New Albany-Plain Local School District. However, when I reviewed the testimony provided to your committee on December 6, I recognize there are teachers who find value in the assessment, and there are organizations in addition to the Ohio Department of Education who value the data to inform decisions. Following Maryland’s model would lead to an increase in local control, which I believe is in the spirit of SB 216, while still providing kindergarten readiness data from across Ohio to policy makers, which I believe would help address a concern of those opposed to the KRA’s elimination.

If I can be of further assistance, I can be reached at emery.3@napls.us or 614-413-7129.