



MARBURN  
ACADEMY



**HB 21 Proponent Testimony**  
**Joint Testimony of Marburn Academy and Lawrence School**  
**Presented by Jamie Williamson (Marburn) and Lou Salza (Lawrence)**  
**Before the Ohio Senate Education Committee**  
**Chair Peggy Lehner**  
**April 11, 2018**

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Education Committee, we are testifying on behalf of the Marburn Academy in Columbus, and Lawrence School located in Broadview Heights and Sagamore Hills. My name is Lou Salza and I am the Head of Lawrence School and am joined by my colleague Jamie Williamson, Head of Marburn Academy. Marburn and Lawrence are nonprofit, tuition-based private independent day schools that exclusively serve children with Learning Differences such as dyslexia, ADHD, executive function issues and high functioning autism. We are testifying today to urge the Senate Education Committee to support an amendment to HB 21 which provides a conditional exemption from state mandated testing for special needs students receiving the Jon Peterson Special Needs or the Autism Scholarship at schools like Marburn Academy and Lawrence School.

Marburn Academy and Lawrence School monitor the progress of our students and the effectiveness of our programs using nationally standardized interim and summative assessments that are appropriate for the students with Learning Differences that we serve. We are deeply committed to accountability and to the growth of our students. Our students have a variety of complex academic needs and as such they greatly benefit from accommodations to curriculum and assessments. Every quarter, IEP goals are reviewed and evaluated for scholarship students. This is done in cooperation with the parents and districts of residence. Every year, we administer assessments in reading, math, and other areas designed to measure each student's skills, achievement levels, patterns of strengths and weakness, and compare their performance to national norms. We utilize the data from these assessments to inform, monitor, and adapt the instructional program for our students and to complete the required annual IEP review and evaluation. Timely, prompt review of IEP goals and standardized assessments allow us to understand why a student is struggling and how to intervene to address the issue. Data from these nationally standardized assessments prove that our programs accelerate the progress of students with Learning Differences, and that we are able to close the persistent literacy gap between students with Learning Differences and their non-LD peers.

Now, I would like to provide some background on why we urge your support of HB 21 and this amendment. Under current law, Marburn and Lawrence high school students take the End of Course Exams which place an undue burden on students with Learning Differences. These assessments are criterion referenced and are designed to measure acquisition of content knowledge and progress toward a content standard. For typically developing students that have strong academic skills these are appropriate measures of course content mastery. However this additional layer of testing required by the State does nothing to enhance the learning outcomes or achievement of our students. In fact, they

do the opposite. The end of course exams provide no useful data for our specialized programs and they rob our students of valuable instructional time that we could be using to target their individual academic needs. In short, this has not been good policy for our students. Given the complex needs of our students it is imperative that we keep our focus on instruction and appropriate special education needs assessment that is most appropriate to meet our students' special needs and build their skills.

This amendment would allow us to continue to use assessments that are most appropriate and provide useful information about progress, achievement and accountability while removing the additional burdens on students and staff of mandated state tests that are inappropriate for our students. The conditions for the exemption in the amendment are strict: eligible schools must have 95% or greater of students enrolled with disabilities; eligible schools must have exclusively served this special needs student population for at least 10 years; eligible schools shall make available to the Ohio Department of Education at least five years of internal testing data for accountability purposes using nationally norm-referenced assessments that demonstrate the programs offered are effective; ensures the eligibility of students on the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship or the Autism Scholarship; and requires the students in our schools to meet the graduation standards of the eligible school's accrediting body.

We support this amendment before you today because it is important to use assessments that are more suitable to the special student population we serve in lieu of inappropriate state mandated assessments. This will allow the focus in our schools to be on meaningful personalized instruction and assessments that take place throughout the year. This data is gathered, analyzed and used to enhance a student's experience, it is shared with parents, teachers and other engaged stakeholders to ensure that the program offered to these students delivers an exceptional educational experience. Our schools are answerable to a discerning and demanding marketplace. We have and will continue to focus on accountability as well as the most appropriate instructional and assessment protocols for these students to prepare them for a successful future.

Chair Lehner and members of the committee, thank you for allowing us to testify on this important issue for Marburn Academy, Lawrence School and our students. We are available to answer any questions at this time.