

**Senate Education Committee
SB 358 Proponent Testimony
Presented by Heather Stambaugh
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Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, and Ranking member Fedor, I am Heather Stambaugh, a High School and CCP American History teacher and President of the Greenon Federation of Teachers. I support the delay of teacher evaluations, seeking a waiver from high stakes tests, pausing report card sanctions for the reasons explained in my testimony.

Education has changed drastically in the last six months. For many, it changes week to week or day by day. I know that seems to be the case for any field under COVID-19 conditions, but few are responsible for the safety, well-being, and education of Ohio's youth.

Teachers and administrators across Ohio feign excitement about their adaptability, persistence, and even their return to school plans. We have to positively tout these new job requirements to help keep the parents and students calm to instill faith in us in tumultuous times. The truth is we are scared, overwhelmed, and exhausted. Despite the emotional warfare of the previous school year and the start of this one, we all persist. The administrators persist. The parents and students persist.

This persistence is precarious. Students, parents, and educational staff are experiencing high levels of stress and trauma. Food insecurities, shifts in family dynamics, job or home loss, higher exposures to unsafe or uncertain living conditions, and the list goes on. While reintroducing students to the routine and rigor of school is welcomed, and in many ways, necessary it is not and cannot be the same. Now more than ever, teachers need to be assessing and addressing student social and emotional learning needs. Teachers need to provide a safe and nurturing environment and consistency in the hectic and confusing world since COVID-19 hit.

Frequently one of the greatest mistakes made is that assuming testing and evaluations is the pinnacle of accountability for teachers. This is false. Our accountability looks us in the eyes, every single day. Our accountability meets us at conferences. In a small town, it's educating the children of our friends and neighbors. Creating caring, thoughtful, critical thinkers is our accountability and it is what every teacher is still working towards, whether attending face to face, hybrid, or virtual.

Our goal is for the children we educate now to be successful individuals and citizens. To do that in the best and most productive way possible, we need your help. High-stakes testing and evaluating educators is not what is best for the children of Ohio.

- Student achievement gaps have increased across the board; to be frank, education was attempted in the spring, but without the familiar routines, rules, and school environment in the traditional sense, students struggled. We are working to address what students missed in the last quarter of the year and start on the grade level material we are required to cover, with potentially less seat time than we usually have with students.
- Student stress and trauma. Test anxiety is real, but many students are in states of toxic stress, the most damaging type of stress this school year. Students experiencing toxic stress are scientifically unable to learn and process in the long term. What information is high-stakes testing going to provide that we do not already know from our assessments and interactions every day in the classroom or as often as we can via Google Meets or Zoom.
- Educator stress and trauma. Educators are being asked to do more than they have ever done with the same funding struggles as pre-COVID. In districts like mine currently meeting face-to-face, we can feel the ever-looming and likely possibility that we will be closed due to staffing issues or another shutdown. We have to have a backup plan, ready to go, and try to transition seamlessly. We were not taught the art of teaching without an audience. We do not know how to be highly engaging with a Google Form and ensure that our students get the same quality of education via Google Classroom as in our classrooms with us. We are putting on a brave front, but our most important goal is not letting students see our fear and anxiety.
- A lack of manpower and funding to ensure test security. Are we expecting parents who have opted out of face to face learning to jump on board with bringing their child in to take a test? If students who have elected to use a virtual format in lieu of face-to-face opt-out or are exempt, will this negatively impact teachers' and districts' ratings? If testing is offered remotely, who is supposed to ensure the safety and security of tests? How do we ensure that the student is actually the person taking the test? How will educators be expected to use test data that will likely point to the disparity in student socio-economics more than student learning?

This concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions.