

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Christina Collins. I am a mother of four, an educator of twelve years, and I have recently been elected to the state board of education. I am here today speaking personally and not on behalf of any organization. I strongly support SB358 and would like to see its timely passage for three reasons:

1. Despite the incredible work of parents and teachers, supporting learning from home is an unbelievable challenge for kids.
2. Learning opportunities since March across the state have varied dramatically, presenting significant barriers for some kids.
3. Student achievement is best measured by local assessments.

Supporting Learning from Home

I would like to speak briefly about how the first few months of school have gone in our household. Both my 6th and 5th grader children started their first month online this year. Because I could overhear much of the instruction, I know their teachers were doing their best to teach via synchronous meetings. Because of my 8 years as a curriculum director, I was aware there was no time wasted - by day three, I heard grade-level-appropriate instruction on the pathway towards yearly standardized objectives. I cheered for these teachers.

At the same time, it was a struggle on our household's side of the equation. Our Internet was often in and out - I understand that's what happens when an entire suburban city is trying to access online school. My kids were often in and out - sometimes gazing off into oblivion despite the most engaging teacher moments and materials, sometimes sneaking in an online game or messaging friends despite my constant surveillance. We tried to do everything "right" in our home - schedules, structure, support - and it was a challenge.

After returning to school for the month of October and finally getting into the routine of being back in a classroom, even with completely new circumstances and mask requirements, one of my children was quarantined as a result of exposure to a confirmed-positive COVID case. She was devastated to be back home again away from her friends. She was scheduled to return to school after the holiday this past week, but due to even more increasing cases, our entire district (as well as an increasing number of districts across the state) has gone back to online school. As a parent, I know this means back to struggling with the Internet, providing structure, support, constant surveillance and reminders to focus.

Varying Learning Opportunities

I am thankful I am currently able to be flexible and make these "pivots", but I recognize this is not the norm. Many parents are struggling with significant barriers that become even more significant barriers for their children, their children's teachers, and all our schools. Many communities do not have even the mediocre internet access we have in our community; many districts do not have adequate funding to provide technology to ensure access to instruction.

What Ohio has done is left all decision-making in a crisis situation up to local administration and boards of education, neither of which has had appropriate (or any) training in responding to a pandemic. And yet, they have done the work of making the best possible decisions given the information they had at a particular time, resulting in a variety of learning experiences across the state. Standardized assessments both in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 (at least) will reflect these difficult decisions far more than actual student achievement.

Reliance on Local Assessments

An argument has been made in previous testimonies on this bill that 8 out of 10 parents want state testing as it is the only way parents know where their children are in their learning. From my most recent experience as an administrator, I would encourage this committee and other groups to look at what our schools are doing internally to assess locally, and I strongly encourage our schools to better inform parents about the value of this local data. We, in the K-12 education community, have seen a significant increase in these local assessments in response to both a lack of promised fall diagnostic assessments through PARCC when the state switched in 2015, as well as in response to mandates for Student Learning Objective assessments tied to teacher evaluations.

The information and data schools can provide at the local level can fulfill the needs of parents and communities for the near future without the added stress of state testing. These locally-developed tests are generally standards-aligned, sometimes nationally-normed, and they do more for ongoing instruction than a single, end-of-year snapshot.

SB358 is asking for a commonsensical approach to testing over the course of the next two school years, and as I review testimony previously provided, it seems proponents and opponents alike share the sentiment that testing this year adds stress to an already-chaotic school year. **I ask that you approve SB358 quickly to lift that strain not just from our teachers and schools, but also from parents like myself who are doing the best we can to help our children learn from home.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak,
Christina Collins, PhD