

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill (HB) 200. My name is Dr. Stephanie Starcher, and I am the proud Superintendent of Fort Frye Local Schools, located in rural southeastern Ohio. I am also Chair of the Report Card Committee for the Buckeye Association of School Administrators. I want to personally thank Representative Robinson and Representative Jones for co-sponsoring this much needed legislation. I had the privilege of serving as the rural school representative on the team that provided insight for this bill. In fact, Chair Manning, I am also here as the past president of the Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools, representing 116 school districts in Ohio, which also passionately support HB 200.

For the past several years, teachers, administrators, parents, business owners, and various elected officials have worked to advocate for changes to the state report card used for Ohio's Accountability system that allegedly measures the quality of schools. I testified before legislators a few years ago regarding Ohio's school report card, but at that time, the atmosphere for changing the state report card system was not ripe. However, I stand here before you today confident that Ohio's stakeholders are ready for a change in how we are measuring and reporting student performance data on our school report card to provide a more fair, sensible system of accountability.

This afternoon, you will hear testimony that supports change to our report card, but there will not be agreement on what kind of changes are best. I respectfully ask that you give considerable weight to the testimony of the people in the educational field, the experts who have been trained in the field and live the reality of public schooling every day in Ohio, who are passionately backing HB 200 as the means to address some of the major issues with the current school report card. As an educator who understands the challenges we face every day and the work we do to help each and every student find success in the midst of those challenges, I want to bring attention to just a few of the proposals in HB 200.

HB 200 replace the current letter-grade system with a six-level system that more clearly defines a district or school's performance on each component. Those ratings range from "Significantly Exceeds Expectations" to "Meets Expectations" to "In Need of Support." HB 200 also prohibits the use of an overall performance rating. Why should we replace letter grade ratings with descriptive levels? I have been a school administrator for 20 years, and ever since the report card system was initiated with letter grades, the general public and media have flocked to see what the letter grades are rather than truly understanding the data and the information behind those grades. These letter grades and the overall ratings have been misused to tell untrue stories about Ohio's schools that certain people and certain

groups want to promote. Then these same flawed report cards are used to make important educational decisions that impact kids and schools.

Many media outlets love the use of these letter grades to create a false sense of fear and urgency around the supposed failures of public schools, which has created a culture of mistrust toward educators. This, in turn, has pushed teachers and administrators away from the field. If the purpose of the state report card system is to inform people about the academic success and challenges of our schools, then we need to force the hand of Ohioans to see more of the detailed information about a school's performance rather than slap an easy letter grade label and overall grade rating on these school report cards.

Several years ago, a parent of a struggling reader shared with me how his son was earning high letter grades on his report card in spelling. This man is a great father, and he was focusing only on this single letter grade mark his student had earned to highlight that he was doing well. However, if he dug into the report card a little deeper and shared that story, he would be telling me that his child was struggling with phonics skills and using phonics to decode new words. He would be asking me more questions about our literacy program and what services we have to help his child. This man was basing his child's literacy skills on a single graded measure without seeing more of the whole picture. In order to improve our educational system, we have to move toward understanding the elements that make up the whole picture and basing supports on this more accurate portrayal.

This is what HB 200 is about – we want to be able to share more information that is part of the whole picture of what is really going on inside of schools and correct the way in which we are accurately calculating certain measures. HB 200 does this by providing sensible, understandable ratings in Achievement, Progress, Gap Closing, Graduation, and the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

Opponents of this legislation might argue that schools should not be given the choice to report achievement or growth in regards to gap closing because this “lowers the standard” for schools and/or kids will be further left behind. First of all, if anyone thinks that allowing growth or achievement instead of just one measure to be part of an accountability component will result in any child being left behind then these individuals truly do not understand learning. I can tell you stories of Ohio children who enroll in our school system that are very far behind in their academic skills, basic knowledge, and social-emotional learning. By the end of the school year, we may not be able to accelerate them fast enough to meet a state assessment score of proficiency at that grade level, but we must be able to help them

meet academic growth. That growth should be recognized and celebrated because our kids do not come to us on level playing fields. Surely we can all agree that hitting an achievement or growth standard ought to both be considered in these scenarios.

Why would we want to change the K-3 Literacy Measure to not “count” the off-track/on-track progress measure of students but only report it? We would all agree that literacy skills are very important to the overall life-long success and wellness of a person. In fact, I often say that literacy is a civil right.

However, the way in which Ohio’s current school report card uses fall test results after three months of summer slump to measure a small group of students who have moved from “off-track” to “on track” does not allow us get an annual measure of growth. If we consult reading specialists in the field, they will tell you that this is an absurd way to monitor if a child is off-track or on-track. The most straightforward way to share information about literacy by the end of the third grade is to report the percentage of students who have met Ohio’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Guarantee.

Another criticism of HB 200 is that a student is not being measured in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy component unless he/she has been enrolled at the school for four years. Six years ago, I underwent treatments for cancer at the James Cancer Center. I asked my doctor if I was going to be okay, and she said that if I followed the complete path of aggressive treatments then I should be just fine. I would not hold my doctor accountability for the pathway to my full recovery if I was not fully participating in the complete course of treatment. Similarly, how do we hold school systems accountable for some of these measures like the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy component when a child might show up on our school doorstep for the first time at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year, and the measure is a benchmark of proficient literacy starting at Kindergarten and going through third grade! That would be similar to me telling my doctor that I expected full recovery even though I was only a participant in 25% of her recommended treatment program. We would never do this in medicine or business so why are we doing it to education?

In closing, I want to emphasize how important it is for us to take advantage of this chance for change when there is bi-partisan support. This is not legislation that is taking us backward in school accountability – it is finally addressing a model that needs fixed. Let’s not miss this opportunity to provide schools supports based on more accurate and fair measures. In Ohio, we should be known for holding our schools accountable, not by demoralizing the people who work there by using inaccurate and punitive approaches to improvement, but by identifying who is in need of help in what areas and providing the necessary supports and resources. HB 200 leads us in that direction. On behalf on the 116 school systems that I am representing today, I hope we can count on your support for HB 200!

I am glad to answer any questions you have.