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Senate Education Committee

Testimony on Senate Bill 145

Lisa A. Gray, President, Ohio Excels
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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 145 (SB 145). My name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels. Joining me today to help with questions is Kevin Duff, our Director of Policy and Research.

Ohio Excels – a non-partisan, non-profit organization created by leaders of Ohio's business community – is committed to helping improve educational outcomes for Ohio's students and ensuring that all K-12 schools prepare students for success in the next step of their lives, whether it is higher education, the military, or the workforce.

School and district report cards are a critical part of improving student outcomes in Ohio. Report cards give parents, families, and members of the community – the primary audience of the report cards – an annual snapshot of how well students are learning. Report cards help identify our highest-performing schools so we can learn from them and flag which schools need additional support.

Ohio's current report card began in 2013. At the time, it received national attention as a model for innovation and transparency. However, over the past several years, it has become clear that the report card needs significant changes.

Ohio Excels and the stakeholder groups that developed the long-term graduation requirements during the last biennial budget began exploring a way to transform the report card almost two years ago. Ohio Excels, the Alliance for High Quality Education, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the Ohio Association for Gifted Children, Columbus City Schools, and the Ohio 8 Coalition discussed each measure and rating in great detail. We also had content experts from the Ohio Department of Education in the conversations to advise us on federal regulations and measurement best practices.

The goal of the work group was to develop a new report card that:
1. Prioritizes equity and ensures that every student counts;
2. Ensures each component is more accurate, predictable, and fair; and
3. Simplifies and streamlines the report card to improve transparency and offer clear, honest information for parents and the public.

We believe that the report card system proposed in SB 145 achieves these goals. However, this was not an easy process. There were many technical discussions, negotiations, and give and take. We greatly appreciate the partnerships with all of these stakeholder groups and the diverse perspectives they bring. This proposal is unique in how it incorporates the perspectives of educators from different regions of the state, advocates of student and stakeholder groups, and technical experts. This has allowed us to create a proposal that meets the needs of parents, families, communities, and educators, but most importantly, it will help to ensure ALL Ohio students are valued.

Today, you'll hear from Ohio Excels and the Alliance for High Quality Education. Over the next few weeks – after spring break is over – you'll hear from more partners and other supporters, including other representative from Ohio's business community. Before we jump into the specific changes found in SB 145, we want to dispel some myths that we all often hear:

MYTH: School and district report cards are designed for educators.
FACT: School and district report cards were created to provide parents, families, and the community with critical student performance data that educators already have access to. The intent of Ohio's report cards was always for external stakeholders, and any reforms should prioritize their needs and perspectives.

MYTH: Parents do not know about Ohio's report cards.
FACT: A poll of Ohio's public school parents last year found that eight out of ten parents have seen the report card for their child's school, district, or both.

MYTH: Parents do not care about Ohio's report cards.
FACT: Three separate polls conducted by Ohio Excels over the past year and a half clearly show that parents strongly support school and district report cards. Nine out of 10 parents consider report cards important, with more than half saying they are very important.

MYTH: If parents do not call a school or district about report card results, it means they do not value report cards.
FACT: Parents have expressed strong appreciation for report cards and having public access to the data even if they do not contact their school or district about the results – especially if the results are positive.

MYTH: Parents do not like assigning A-F letter grades to schools.
FACT: In poll after poll, Ohio's parents have indicated that among various options, including a 0-100 scale, text descriptors, and even stars, letters grades are the preferred ratings for parents. Roughly nine out of 10 parents believe letter grades are clear, easy to understand, and appropriate for rating schools. That said, we know that our education associations strongly object to receiving A-F letter grades.

We have included a short summary of SB 145's changes to the report card with our testimony. I encourage you to read through the summary. Today, I will focus on the most important changes from Ohio Excels' perspective.

Report Card Overview
This proposal streamlines the number of ratings from 14 to just six components focused on the most important aspects of student learning. The overall rating continues in this proposal. It is popular with parents and helps maintain transparency. To make the report card fairer, SB 145 includes more growth components and measures

throughout. All but one component (achievement) factors in some sort of growth or improvement, making it possible for all schools to demonstrate how they are improving student outcomes and for parents to see that schools are moving in the right direction.

Finally, a major advantage of this proposal is that it meets the needs of Ohio's parents *and* federal report card requirements. This means that there won't be two significantly different report card systems – one for the state and one for federal reporting and consequences. This will increase transparency and avoid situations where schools might have acceptable ratings on the state's report card but still not meet federal requirements.

Rating Labels

While we still strongly support A-F letter grades, and we know that grades are parents' first choice, we have joined with our partners in supporting a 1-5 star rating system in the spirit of compromise. It is critical to Ohio Excels and our business partners that we maintain five performance levels on the report card. This allows for comparisons over time so we can identify trends and growth. Keeping five levels also allows for simple updates to more than a dozen state policies that rely on report card results. Moving away from five levels would require the state to renegotiate some of the most contentious policy issues all at the same time. Finally, SB 145 adds additional context and clarity to the ratings through trend arrows, color schemes, and explanations for each rating level.

Component Improvements

Our stakeholder group spent weeks improving each component. Some of the major changes include:
- Removing the indicators met measure, which was a duplicative measure focused on assessment result;
- Focusing on overall student growth in the Progress component and removing the subgroup demotion;
- Keeping a five-year graduation rate to give schools credit for continuing to help students reach a diploma;
- Reporting information on the students who did not graduate on time to highlight how schools are still serving students, especially students with disabilities; and
- Prioritizing achievement *and* growth for all student groups through the Equity component.

Early Literacy Component

The proposal also includes a new Early Literacy Component to ensure that there is a strong focus on inarguably the most important and necessary foundational education skill: reading. Unfortunately, the component on the current report card is limited, and it does not capture how well all students are able to read. This new component measures, with equal weight, how well all students are reading by the end of the third grade *and* how well schools are helping struggling readers to be reading at grade level.

First, it measures the percent of students proficient on the state's third grade reading test. Second, it overhauls the current literacy improvement measure to address all of the concerns from educators, including a stable rating scale and no more deductions. The component uses actual measures of reading proficiency – diagnostic and state assessments – to ensure an accurate and comparable view of reading proficiency. Other statistics, such as Third Grade Reading Guarantee promotion rate, include non-reading factors or use benchmarks below proficiency. Ohio Excels strongly believes it is important to report and rate the Early Literacy component proposed in SB 145.

Prepared for Success Component

While early literacy is the most important early foundational component, Prepared for Success is the component that reflects the ultimate goal of a student's educational journey – how well we have prepared our students above and beyond the graduation requirements for the next step in their lives after high school. The current component has many major concerns, including limited options for students to demonstrate readiness, a confusing tiered structure, and an impractical grading scale. While we know educators appreciate the goal of the measure, we know that the failings of the current component have soured many educators on including anything similar on a new report card. However, the new component in SB 145 addresses all of these concerns.

The new Prepared for Success component eliminates the tiered structure and expands the options for earning points with three new career-focused options, two new academic options, and an option recognizing the importance of entering the military. This gives students nine options to demonstrate readiness that better reflect life after high school. Furthermore, recognizing that all schools and districts are starting from different places, the component ensures that no school or district that is making significant improvements will earn less than three stars for this component. Like Early Literacy, Ohio Excels strongly believes it is important to report and rate the Prepared for Success component proposed in SB 145.

Report Card Implementation

We are hoping the changes described in this bill begin right away, ideally with the 2022 report card. We know that the state needs a little more time to collect the information for the Prepared for Success component, so SB 145 will propose that this measure be reported only until the 2024 report card, when it too will be rated. Finally, SB 145 includes an important provision that requires districts to proactively notify parents when the state report cards are released – something eight out of 10 parents would like to happen.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Senator Brenner and his staff for helping to bring this proposal to fruition and his support for SB 145. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of a new report card system, one that we believe will be more accurate, fair, transparent, and prioritize the success of all students. We would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

REPORT CARD REFORM PROPOSAL

Overview

Annual report cards play an important role in healthy, accountable K–12 education systems. While the current model has strengths, it can be improved in ways that make it fairer to schools and more usable to parents, communities, and policymakers. This proposal improves the report card to focus on key measures of student achievement and growth, updates components to allow schools to demonstrate success in additional ways, and ensures accountability for all student groups, including low-income, special-education, and gifted children. Taken together, these comprehensive improvements lay the groundwork for a world-class report card that is informative to families and fair to schools.

Purpose of report cards

- Offer parents and communities an annual snapshot of school quality
- Ensure that ALL students are being provided opportunities to reach their potential, including traditionally underserved students
- Identify high-performing schools whose practices are worth emulating
- Flag low-performing schools that need more support

Principles underlying the proposal

- **Equity:** Ensure high expectations for all students and that each student counts
- **Transparency:** Offer parents and communities clear, simple, and honest information
- **Fairness:** Give every school opportunities to demonstrate growth and improvement
- **Accuracy:** Ensure components are measuring what is intended

Summary of key reforms

- Streamlines the number of rated measures from fourteen down to six and an overall rating
- Eliminates indicators met, student group demotions, and reading-plan deductions
- Makes significant structural improvements to report card components
  - Focuses Achievement and Progress on key measures of proficiency (performance index) and growth for all students (overall value-added)
  - Revises Equity (formerly Gap Closing) to ensure achievement and growth of all student groups count and the individual needs of students are being met
  - Creates fairer and more accurate Early Literacy component that measures both reading improvement over time and 3rd grade proficiency rates of all students
  - Updates Prepared for Success by eliminating its two-tiered structure and adding ways students can demonstrate readiness through new academic, career, and military-readiness options
- Puts more weight on Achievement and Progress in the Overall rating, and adds growth and improvement dimensions into more measures
- Includes additional context alongside star ratings to help parents and communities better understand school performance (descriptors and trend arrows)
- Ensures rating scales are set appropriately and offer meaningful differentiation

REPORT CARD REFORM: ABOUT THE PROPOSAL

Report card components

- Maintains current six components of the report card: Achievement, Progress, Graduation, Equity (formerly Gap Closing), Early Literacy, and Prepared for Success
- Eliminates redundant "subcomponent" ratings that make current report card unwieldy
- Makes significant structural improvements to components that enhance transparency and increase fairness and accuracy of measures

Overall rating

- Continues the overall rating, a simple and transparent approach that parents want
- Rating based on following weights:
  - Achievement and Progress—25 percent each
  - Graduation, Equity, Early Literacy, and Prepared for Success—12.5 percent each

Rating policies

- Stars are used for each component and overall rating
- Descriptive context and coloring included to further add context to the ratings
- Trends indicated through use of directional arrows next to ratings
- State Board of Education to establish rating scales for each component
- Plan ensures that each component's rating scale is set appropriately and properly differentiates performance

Transparency

- Meets federal requirements and maintains one straightforward report card, meaning state and federal supports use the same rating system
- Parental notification of report card release required of schools
- Report card made available on district and school websites

Transition timeline

- August 2021 to March 2022: State Board creates component grading scales
- September 2022: Release of first year of updated report cards (based on 2021-22 data)
- September 2024: Prepared for Success is rated and included in the overall rating

- **9 out of 10 parents believe report cards are important**

- **8 out of 10 parents want to be notified when the state releases the report card**

- **9 out of 10 parents want a rated measure of how well schools prepare students for success after high school**

REPORT CARD REFORM PROPOSAL

Proposed changes to report card components

Note: This highlights significant changes—it's not an exhaustive list—within the six components of Ohio's report card.

Component	Proposal Summary	Key Changes
Achievement *Student performance on state exams at a single point in time*	Rating based on performance index, a weighted measure of student achievement	• Eliminates indicators met (proficiency rates are report-only) • Moves chronic absenteeism and gifted indicator to Equity component
Progress *Student growth on state exams over time*	Rating based on overall district- or school-wide value added score	• Uses 3-year weighted average value added (growth) score, with more emphasis on most recent year; report both the 1 and 3-year scores • Eliminates the student group demotion • Moves gifted and students with disabilities growth data to Equity • Eliminates reporting on the lowest 20% student group
Graduation *Attainment of diploma within 4 or 5 years of entering high school*	Rating based on composite 4- and 5-year graduation rate	• Maintains the current weighting and calculation of graduation rates • Reports the number of students not graduated, but who are receiving extended services to add additional context about non-graduates
Equity *Achievement, growth, and graduation rates of specific groups of students*	Rating based on an updated version of the current Gap Closing component, which focuses on the achievement *and* growth of student groups as well as the unique needs of certain student groups	• Updates current gap closing measure to factor each student groups' performance index and value added data as well as graduation rates • Adds chronic absenteeism and the gifted indicator to the component, joining the English learners' progress indicator • Maintains current minimum "n-size" of 15 students in a student group

Early Literacy *Progress in early literacy among elementary students*	Rating based on a two-part measure using 3rd grade reading proficiency rates and improvement on reading diagnostic assessments to give schools credit for all students' progress and to ensure struggling readers get extra attention	• Updates current Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers measure to:
		  ◦ Eliminate Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plan (RIMP) deductions
		  ◦ Creates permanent rating scale and changes the kindergarten threshold to 10%
		• Incorporates each school's 3rd grade reading proficiency rates, which counts for half of the measure
		• Reports Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) data to add context to reading achievement levels

Prepared for Success *High school students' readiness for college, career, or military service*	Rating based on how many students in a graduating class demonstrate readiness for life after high school using an expanded list of nine academic, career, and military options	• Eliminates the current two-tiered component structure • Includes academic options such as AP/IB exams or College Credit Plus completion • Adds three career-focused options for students: apprenticeships, WebXams, and internships/OMJ readiness seal • Adds military readiness as an option for students • Gives schools extra credit for annual improvements in readiness rates • Continues reporting college enrollment and completion rates • Report available data right away, and rate the component starting with the 2024 report card