

## **Joint Education Oversight Committee**

### **Testimony on Ohio's State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act**

**March 2, 2017**

#### **J. Chris Pfister, Superintendent, Waynesfield-Goshen Local School District**

Good afternoon Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Committee.

My name is Chris Pfister and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts with you this afternoon. I would also like to thank Superintendent DeMaria, Colleen Grady, and other individuals at ODE for their work with the state plan; a very daunting task. I also greatly appreciate Superintendent DeMaria's dedication to ongoing work with education policy after the state's submission to the U.S. Department of Education. There is much work to be done.

My focus has always been on the most effective ways to raise student achievement (best teaching practices and formative assessment) and the pathways to best prepare students for success in life. I am confident that is everyone's goal. I also understand that we must have accountability tests for their unique purpose and to meet federal requirements in order to receive federal funds. Therefore my focus today is on the state testing elements of the plan and to also share thoughts on elements that are derivatives of state testing and how state tests impact other areas of education.

When Congress passed ESSA to replace the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation there was a spirit of allowing more state flexibility; more state and local control, and required less standardized testing. As you know the new federal requirements are one math and one English Language Arts test in grades 3-8, one each at the high school, and three science tests at different grade bands. Seventeen (17) total tests.

Following work to collect input ODE left the total number of standardized tests at twenty-four (24). Those tests are the fall English Language Arts test at third grade; Social Studies tests at 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and high school end of program tests in American History, American Government, English Language Arts I, English Language Arts II (only one would be required), Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated math I, Integrated math II (only one would be required), and Biology. Stakeholder input was overwhelming supportive of reducing the number of tests.

In follow-up meetings with state board members and with ODE representatives it was shared that the state board and the department cannot reduce tests. That the tests are codified in law and it would take the action of the state legislature to make any changes.

**Therefore I am respectfully asking you to consider making changes to the state proposal based on the following:**

- 1. Eliminate all non-required tests in the plan (fall English Language Arts at grade 3, social studies at grades 4 and 6, American History, American Government, three of the math, and one English Language Arts)**
- 2. Make Algebra I, English Language Arts II, and Biology the three federally required high school tests.**
- 3. Keep the fall Third Grade English Language Arts test as a state requirement (because there is value, the results are returned within the same school year and can be used as a guide for improvement during the year).**
- 4. Do not use HS test results as one of the elements required to earn a high school diploma (not required in federal law) this also resolves the graduation percentage issue.**

In a perfect world we would not have a “State Plan to meet ESSA”; rather we would have a state plan that meets the needs of the state of Ohio. So I consider all of the above necessary, but not very meaningful in our mission to significantly raise student achievement and prepare all students for success in career or college.

#### **Important Considerations:**

##### **Time on Tests**

If the goal is to raise student achievement, then the issue of too much time on tests was misinterpreted and addressed incorrectly. It was expressed that the state tests take little time; so the problem must be all these other tests to get the students ready for the state test. So cap formative assessment at a low level and keep all the state tests that teachers never see and the results come back when the students are gone. In reality, formative assessment given in real time today to determine who learned and who did not learn, then using that information to work with the students that did not learn, is the most valuable and effective assessment/testing that can be done to raise student achievement. It is the process that will produce higher levels of student learning; what happens in the classroom today in real time. The teacher cannot work with students when state test results are received after the school year is over. Additionally the results are not specific enough to be useful in helping each individual student learn and grow. State tests serve accountability purposes; but only very limited, incremental use in raising student achievement.

When I came to W-G in 2011 state results were not good. The district was under the Ohio Improvement Plan and everyone was tense. After studying what was in place my directive was to let me worry about state complexity and for the teachers to focus on student learning. We built a plan to focus on the standards, best teaching practices, strategies, tools, and importantly formative assessment; make sure you know who has learned and at what level of competency by using frequent short-cycle assessments. Then develop strategies and interventions until all

students were at the level to move on to the next level. Do whatever it takes to move every student from where they are to where they need to be. At the end of three years we moved from 490 of 800+ to 260 of 800+ in the academic performance index; up 230 positions. Then came PARRC, and then came AIR, and three consecutive years of different testing that cannot be compared.

It is the process in the classroom, now, today, in real time that will increase student learning; not data received when the student is gone. Time is precious; I want to keep teachers focused on the most effective strategies; doing more of what is most effective to achieve significant learning gain.

**I respectfully ask that you consider the following as we move forward:**

**Money allocated to teaching practices and formative assessment, versus state tests, would significantly raise student achievement. Differentiating assessments based on individual students needs would greatly increase student employability and better meet the needs of Ohio employers. All students will not be merit scholars, but all students can be prepared for success.**

#### **Value Added**

I would suspect that part of the resistance to reduce testing is because of Value Added; it is one of the dominos in the system; if state testing is reduced the need for Value Added data is reduced. I suspect that millions of taxpayer dollars have been put into Value Added.

Value Added is a year's worth of growth for students, from one year to the next. It is old data, not very useful for our teachers, but does have some incremental value and is again primarily an accountability factor used in the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES).

It is necessary to have a test in every subject, at every grade level, to have a valid system of Value Added. However, the academics would say they can create sophisticated mathematical models to compute Value Added, like was done to compare 5<sup>th</sup> grade science teachers to 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teachers. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher got dinged if she did didn't get the right amount of "growth" in the kids from four years ago; and often not even the same set of kids. The Value Added data is automatically uploaded into the eTPES system for the Student Growth Measure part (50%) of the teacher evaluation (OTES).

We are an "A" district in Value Added; super! I could spend many hours interpreting what that means and how great we are and it will mean absolutely nothing to anyone in my community. More importantly, there are better ways to advance student learning. It is what happens in the classroom today; not old data, that produces results. There are much more effective data systems that I want my teachers to focus their limited time on.

Historically this all goes back to wanting to have a statewide teacher evaluation system and at the beginning I can remember a legislator at a hearing becoming frustrated with the ODE

presenter and said “I said I want Value Added used for all teachers”. The only problem was Value Added did not exist for 75% of the teachers in Ohio (zero for K-3, all academic teachers in non-tested areas, art, music, PE/Health, Spanish, career-technical, and other). So to address the problem ODE came up with something to use, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and teacher written tests based on their self-written objectives; while more state tests could be developed. I can remember the massive amount of time used to create all of the objectives and tests and mostly for no good reason. For example if my music students could read music, sing sweetly, put on a great musical production, and the band members could read music, play their instruments competently and on note, and march in a straight line I was pretty happy. Now the 75% of the teachers needed to come up with a complex paper document, separate from the current curriculum, and a written test to use for their Student Growth Measure for OTEs. They did, but not the best use of their time. The teachers that did have a Value Added score were not too thrilled either, that most of their peers got to write their own objectives and tests; while they had to be rated on a state test; not knowing what was on the state test, nor how it would be scored.

The Legislature has always been fair to teachers and put in place a “safe harbor” provision for FY15 and FY16 because of the three consecutive years of very different tests. What that also means is that over the past two years there has been significant expense to create Value Added data that was not used. My understanding is that Value Added will be used in future years.

**I respectfully ask that you consider eliminating the Student Growth Measure half of the teacher evaluation and eliminating Value Added data, as it would not be needed. Money expended on a less than effective way of increasing student learning can be saved. Teachers could then be compared fairly and consistently based on the ten standards of quality instruction. Currently about 37% of my teachers have SMG ratings that are based on state tests (Value Added) and 63% on a self-written test. Therefore, state tests in almost two-thirds of my classrooms cannot be used for the Student Growth Measure (SGM); if the SGM side is eliminated this would also allow for the elimination of two tests, the baseline SGM test and the year end SGM test. [When you factor in diagnostics, ACT, and the SGM tests, the total number of state mandated tests exceeds 30]**

Also, I recently had a teacher ask if their job was in jeopardy next year after reading a media report about funding being cut at small, rural districts. What does this have to do with testing?

Under OTEs (50% testing) only the evaluation counts for who will be cut in a Reduction-In-Force, not seniority, not the good things the teacher may be doing for students. So Value Added, based exclusively on a one time two hour state test, could not only cause embarrassment with a teacher’s peers but could actually cost a good teacher their job.

Teachers remember the RIFs implemented at W-G in 2011 and in 2013, prior to the equitable funding system put in place in 2015. The elimination of the SGM side of evaluation would restore an element of the rights of the local Board of Education to control of the workforce.

## **Do we have the right measurements for what we want to accomplish?**

Many educators question if the state tests are developmentally appropriate and if the tests actually assess the right things. Everyone knows it is critical to know how to read, write, do math, to be able to think, problem solve etc. Do the tests measure what we think they do?

I would suspect that you would question some of the material in practice tests being aligned with what you are trying to accomplish. Let's narrow to the critical knowledge and skills and focus on the important.

Principles found in physical science apply in Ohio manufacturing; engineering, technology, automated manufacturing, design, applied math, motion, hydraulics, pneumatics, etc. but physical science was removed as a state test. Biology is the state test.

The governor's workforce agenda prescribes "project based learning" and more connections with business and industry. Refreshing, practical real world agenda, preparing students for entry level jobs and career pathways. Very positive for all students, particularly those students that have difficulty with academics and want to go to work directly out of high school. Yet the state of Ohio only places value on one measure- standardized testing; 14 of 16 report card measures are tied exclusively to state standardized academic tests. The 15<sup>th</sup> area "Prepared for Success" is based on written academic tests, AP tests, the ACT, the SAT, College Credit Plus, International Business (rare); and career-technical. Career-technical students must pass the ACT Work Keys tests, as well as being enrolled in a vocational program that holds a national accreditation, versus being based on the specific needs of local employers (in order to be counted as "prepared for success"). The 16<sup>th</sup> measure is graduation rate.

It is human nature to focus on what you will be evaluated on...which is, in Ohio, written academic tests, uniform for every student, measure the worth of every teacher and every school district. If your name, your worth, was being placed on the front page of the newspaper, exclusively based on state tests, would you work on state tests or something else that might benefit students more?

I support higher standards. Teachers will figure out the new mandated tests as new material becomes available and will get the job done, it just takes time. However, I also strongly support multiple measurements, like technical skills training with performance measurements (not just what you know, but what you can do) for in demand jobs, so we can set all kids up for success. It seems the biggest concern is standardization; forcing all students into one box, college. State tests have little meaning for some students. Perhaps Governor Kasich is on to something, maybe it is time to meet local community business and industry needs. Fifty percent of our students have no money to go to college and excel in project based learning. Yet we deny them opportunities. State tested teachers resent our manufacturing teacher taking them to area industries because they have to get them ready to take the state tests. State test preparation becomes a barrier to options that would be much more beneficial for a set of students; and will remain a barrier if tied to the state report card and the teacher evaluation system.

My hope is that the legislature will seriously consider changing the sole emphasis, the sole measurement of the worth of a district, from standardized testing to a system that better prepares all students for success.

**Therefore I respectfully ask that you consider:**

- **Holding the Ohio State Test Performance Standard Cut Scores at the same level**
- **Holding the percentage of students that must score at proficient or higher on a state test at the same percentage (as FY16) needed to meet the report card metric for at least this year (FY17)** [Teachers have had only one year's experience with the new tests and the tests are more difficult. For example, well over half of the students in Ohio could not hit the 700 point cut score to be considered proficient on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts test last spring. At W-G our number of students proficient or higher was 55%. Not acceptable and we have made changes. 74% was needed to get credit for "indicator met". The state announced an increase to 80% of students for all tests this year. Last year the percentage of students needed to be proficient or higher ranged between 66% and 80%; with 24 of 26 OST tests below 80%. Results were bad statewide last year, at 80% they most likely will be worse this year.]
- **Develop a series of realistic technical skills tests with integrated academics based on the needs of Ohio employers [a comprehensive initiative with heavy involvement of business and industry] and use as a "gap filler" for students that struggle with standardized tests** [We were just contacted by a student that left our district without a diploma three years ago. They wanted to retake the OGT science test; the only test they could not pass; they had all credits, and passed the other four OGT tests. Thus one of five state tests kept them out of the workforce; still unemployed, now more mature, and desperately wanting a job; except no employer will hire them because they do not have a HS Diploma. There is nothing we can do; the state says time has expired. They can seek a GED; but with the tests now being more difficult, may or may not pass; potentially remaining unemployed and on assistance]

## **The Future**

Again I greatly appreciate hearing Superintendent DeMaria's commitment to continuing work with education policy; regardless of federal requirements. If we believe the current system is not preparing all students for success, we need to do something differently. I sincerely believe we can create a dynamic system in Ohio that can meet the needs of all students, employers, taxpayers and residents if we slow down, clearly identify priorities, re-engineer the system, and then implement with fidelity. If there is any way can be of service or helpful in any way I would be very happy to assist.

Thank you.