

Testimony of Krista Taylor
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Chair Cupp, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Joint Education Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the Every Student Succeeds Act. My name is Krista Taylor, and I am an Intervention Specialist in the Cincinnati Public Schools.

My understanding is that the impetus for these conversations is to determine if the Ohio draft plan for the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act reflects the views of people across the state and is a visionary document.

I'd like to commend the Ohio Department of Education for their work in engaging stakeholders across the state in dialogue on this topic; however, having read the plan and the stakeholder feedback, I do not believe that it serves as the best reflection of the public's voice.

The stakeholder conversations revealed over-whelming support for reduced testing. The Ohio Draft plan notes that testing has been reduced since the 2014-2015 school year; however, this data is a bit of red herring, as that was the year of PARCC testing, which included a double administration for every test. When that year is removed as anomalous, it becomes clear that testing requirements have consistently increased, rather than decreased, over time. While some of this testing is currently mandated by the federal government, Ohio's testing requirements exceed the mandate by 7 tests annually. Since each test has two sections, this is effectively 14 additional testing sessions. The draft plan indicated no intended change in this.

Another area of dramatic stakeholder feedback was the desire to untie the teacher evaluation system from student test results as allowable under ESSA. While the language in the draft plan acknowledges this concern, it notes that while change will be considered in the future, no change would be made at this time.

In these two critically important areas, I would say that Ohio's Draft Plan does not serve as an effective reflection of the public's voice.

The determination of whether or not the Ohio draft plan is visionary brings to the fore a deeper concern. For more than a decade, students, teachers, and schools have been subject to a business-based model of assessment and accountability. After significant research and study, I have come to believe that this is an entirely faulty practice, and as frequently as the words "data-driven decision making" have been used, I have yet to see any data that indicates that the implementation of this model has been effective.

To truly act as visionaries, we must look at the long-range, big picture of education, and we must change the paradigm regarding how we measure school effectiveness. Public schools are the bastion of our democracy, and invariably when asked about the most critical outcomes for students, people respond with goals such as social intelligence, creativity, problem-solving, persistence, critical thinking, respect, and compassion.

These skills exemplify the growth of the whole child, and they can't be measured by any test.

In fact, high-stakes testing and school accountability have significantly decreased the ability of schools to work on building these skills. We know that this problem is most pronounced in our urban schools, where more of our students come to us impacted by toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences. It is these students who exhibit the greatest need for development of these skills. Yet it is typically schools with the highest levels of student poverty that have the lowest test scores, and where, as a result, the emphasis on testing and testing preparation is the greatest. This is a crippling Catch-22. The students who most need the most important skills are given the least amount of time to learn them, as the time for development of "soft skills" is whittled away from their school day out of desperation for increasing the "all-important" test scores.

To be truly visionary, Ohio will need to minimize testing and school accountability to the greatest degree possible, and to trust teachers as highly-skilled professionals who know how to measure student growth and development.

If you wish to be visionary, then I implore you to listen to the voices of teachers as those who know the needs of students best.

A more detailed version of my concerns and the data behind them can be found in the Open Letter I wrote in January to Secretary DeVos, Governor Kasich, and Superintendent DeMaria. This letter has been widely supported by teachers, administrators, and parents worldwide and has been read over 360,000 times. It is linked [here](http://angelsandsuperheroes.com/2017/01/09/1112/). <http://angelsandsuperheroes.com/2017/01/09/1112/>.