

**Testimony for the Ohio General Assembly**  
**Joint Education Oversight Committee**  
**Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Superintendent, Shaker Heights City School District**  
**March 9, 2017**

Good morning, Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Sykes and Members of the Committee.

I am Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings Jr., Superintendent of the Shaker Heights City School District.

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today.

Many of my fellow superintendents bemoan the lack of parent and community involvement in their school districts.

We in Shaker Heights are blessed with a highly engaged community of stakeholders who are knowledgeable about education issues at a local, state and national level.

Last year, the Ohio Department of Education invited feedback on the implementation of the Every Students Succeeds Act, which was signed into law by former President Obama in 2015.

We in Shaker Heights took that invitation to heart.

In early 2016, Dr. Terri Breeden, our Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, and I convened a 28-member task force made up of teachers, students, administrators and community members.

The task force focused on six topics contained in the new federal education law and identified our concerns as well as recommendations for change.

We incorporated the task force's work into a White Paper that we circulated throughout our community and shared with local and state lawmakers.

Last August, we shared that work with the Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction and met here in Columbus with his staff for two hours.

I have provided members of this Committee with a copy of our White Paper, so I will not detail those recommendations at this time.

However, I would respectfully urge you to review our ideas which, even a year later, remain relevant to this Committee's work.

The work of our task force work was both deliberate and thoughtful, and it reflects the thinking of one of Ohio's most diverse and highly educated communities.

With my remaining time, I'd like to draw your attention to several current issues and concerns that stem from the ESSA draft plan.

I want to make clear that several of the points I will make today may not directly impact Shaker students, or at least not on a large scale.

Still, our community believes Ohio's public education system belongs to all Ohioans, and what hurts one district, one school or one child, hurts us all.

First, I want to address the issue of deadlines and timing. We understand that Ohio and other states have an option of submitting their plans this spring, or waiting until the fall.

Potential changes in policy and philosophy within the U.S. Department of Education are unclear. We do know that we have a new President, and a new Secretary of Education.

Given those changes, it would seem to make sense to wait until the fall to submit our plans.

While the Ohio Department of Education has been gathering information from school district and communities across the state for months, the Department's deadline for feedback on the draft plan was Monday, March 6, 2017.

Giving ourselves an April deadline does not allow much time to digest feedback from that draft. The new ESSA gives states an unprecedented amount of autonomy and flexibility. We are shortchanging ourselves—and our students—if we do not take advantage of this opportunity.

Second, we as a state need to include in our plan further requirements to ensure that our charter schools are high-quality programs.

We all know that there are many excellent charter schools in our state. For example, the Breakthrough Schools in Cleveland are an exemplar we hope other charter schools will emulate.

Sadly, not all charter schools are setting high expectations and providing a rigorous curriculum for our underprivileged young people. We need to ensure that they do.

Third, I am certain that all of us in this room believe in accountability—I know I do.

We in Shaker Heights certainly believe we should be held accountable by our parents, our students and our taxpayers.

But we also believe that we need to define accountability beyond the narrow confines of the state assessment—a single data point from one moment in time.

I commend ODE for listening to stakeholders regarding reduction of testing time for students.

But when it comes to measuring student mastery of materials, we need to be more innovative and more creative. Indeed, we need to be as innovative and creative as the students we teach.

I would ask that Ohio adopt multiple assessments and alternative assessments as measurements for mastery.

Specifically, the ODE can identify assessments aligned with the Ohio Learning Standards and provide a mastery level for each assessment on a state-approved assessment list for local-determined assessments.

The focus should be on student mastery as well as proficiency, on multiple assessments versus a complete focus on one assessment.

Also, the state should permit students to substitute the ACT or SAT for their high school assessment. These exams are used to help determine college admissions and serve as a widely accepted indicator that students are college-ready.

I would also suggest that the ODE conduct a cohort analysis from year-to-year, rather than a grade analysis. We are comparing apples to oranges when we conduct an analysis using last year's third grade and this year's third grade.

We in public education are charged with preparing students for success in college, career and life. That is why we should also use nonacademic measures that include experiences students have outside of the classroom such as internships, international travel, service projects, and community outreach.

Third, we cannot discuss accountability without discussing the State Report Card.

Too often, the A-F rating system misleads many families in our district or families who are considering our district as an option for their children.

Furthermore, we need to ensure that we provide an explanation for the actual rating which in turn will limit misinterpretation of school performance.

In Shaker Heights, for example, all of our third-graders were identified by the state's own standards as reading at grade level.

However, this accomplishment earned our district only an "F" grade on the State Report Card.

I have made multiple inquiries as to why. I stand before you today still unable to adequately answer that question.

In Shaker Heights, we have had students accepted to every Ivy League school two years running.

We are one of only eight school districts in North America to offer the prestigious International Baccalaureate to every student at every grade level.

Our high school offers more Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes than school—public or private.

Our students score significantly above state and national averages on the SAT and ACT exams.

Our graduation is up to 93 percent, and our achievement gap between groups of students has been significantly reduced. Our music and arts programs are without peer.

The grades on our State Report Card are misleading, unfair and, frankly, insulting to our students, our teachers and our entire community.

And we are not the only district that feels that way.

We have an exemplar for measuring school quality in Shaker that we call “Measuring What Matters.” It is our annual report to our stakeholders, and I am sharing it with you today.

Fourth, instead of focusing on “externships” for our teachers with businesses, we should be collaborating with businesses on workforce development plans. Such plans would ensure our young people are prepared for good-paying jobs should they choose to enter the workplace directly after high school.

Fifth, we need to ensure that the governor’s budget is aligned with our ESSA plan in regards to adequate funding for high-quality preschool programs, Career Technical Education, the Third-Grade Reading Guarantee and Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics (STEM).

The state also needs to adopt and fund an early-warning system to identify students who are not on the trajectory to complete high school requirements in four years. This system should use indicators such as attendance, discipline, and academic data.

Finally, we need to incorporate adequate funding to build capacity around Ohio’s new standards and academic assessments for teachers and administrators. We must be certain that these new learning standards are implemented with fidelity, regardless of local funding levels.

In closing, the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents us with an opportunity to make some meaningful changes on behalf of our students.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify at this hearing. I am happy to take any questions.

