

Good afternoon Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Sykes, and esteemed members of the Committee. I am Dale Lewellen, superintendent of Bath Local Schools in Allen County. I would like to thank all of you for your willingness to place such a significant value on education and for the opportunity to testify before you today.

As a member of the Northwest/West Central Ohio Public School Advocacy Network (a group of over forty school superintendents in West Central and Northwest Ohio), I have been involved in discussions surrounding ESSA and how it relates to the Ohio education system for the past year. Although there are many facets to the plan, I will limit my testimony today to two very interrelated plan components: testing and the state report card.

First, there have been many opportunities for stakeholders around the state to offer feedback concerning the state plan and the NWCOPSAN has taken part in most of these sessions. While in attendance, our members heard the overwhelming cry to reduce testing in the state. Language in the plan states that Ohio is considered a leader in creating high standards and expectations. As I read this, I have to wonder who is offering this opinion and how well do they truly understand the impact of our testing and report card system on children.

My colleagues and I advocate that we reduce our testing in Ohio to the federal minimum requirement. We also recommend removing any testing component from the graduation requirement as this is also not required by federal law. In Ohio, we consistently roll out new tests with little to no information available to teachers concerning the assessments and the context of the assessments. We are told that we have the standards and if we just teach students how to meet the standards, they will succeed on the tests. I will tell you that there is more to it than that. We don't truly know what is expected of our students until they take the first test. The nuances in the manner of question formatting, answer option wording, and how writing samples are evaluated cannot truly be realized until students have experienced the test. After that first test administration, teachers are simply provided with information that tells how their student achieved on the overall tests and on groupings of questions related to each standard. Teachers never know why their students succeeded or failed, because they never get to see their students' responses to the questions. They do not get to see how test evaluators weighed or assessed a student's responses in relation to the rubric for extended response questions. I submit to you that, without the "why", teachers are essentially shooting in the dark to determine how to adjust their teaching practice to better prepare our students for the assessments.

I would also argue students generally have no stake in achieving success on the test and therefore may easily be motivated to give less than their best effort when they take the test. Students in grades four through eight have no investment incentive attached to their performance on the test. I recently completed one of the sample questions in Reading/Language Arts online. The reading sample was from Shakespeare and the questions asked the student to analyze the excerpt at a higher level than tests in the past. When I imagine that I am a middle school student who has been told to "just relax and do your best as there are no consequences", which we often do because students get very nervous and tense when taking these tests, I can easily see myself making quick choices to get this test behind me. Our teachers are being evaluated based on their students' performance under these conditions. Our schools are being labeled based on their

students' performance under these conditions. This is one of several reasons I do not feel that placing the level of emphasis on testing as the principal measure of success for a school district or teacher makes sense.

Our state report card is complex, confusing, and punitive. None of these characteristics lead to improving the education of our children. I certainly understand the need for accountability and I believe that testing has a place in that function. I do not believe that placing demeaning labels on districts, who are ultimately people serving our students, will have a positive impact on the education of our children. I feel the A-F format of our report card should be eliminated and replaced with a system that reports percentages, goals, and progress toward those goals.

One important point I want to make today is that the state's ESSA plan clearly outlines reasonable goals for the state to achieve progress in the area of student achievement on the state assessments. The plan shows charts outlining the achievement levels produced in the 2015-2016 testing cycle and sets reasonable goals to reach an eighty percent achievement level by the year 2025. However, our school districts are expected to achieve that lofty eighty percent mark this school year or be labeled a failure. I think the achievement expectations the state has placed on itself should be applied to school districts in the 2016-2017 testing cycle and progress as the state plan outlines through 2025.

In closing, I want to express that I truly believe everyone involved in this process has the best interest of our children in mind as proposals are drafted and plans are implemented. I am encouraged by the increased level of input sought as the legislature and the Ohio Department of Education move into the next phase of our journey to provide a world class education to our children. My hope is that we can move away from what I feel has been an extremely autocratic method of creating education policy in Ohio over the past ten years under both Democratic and Republican leadership and move toward a more collaborative effort. It is one thing to hold sessions and collect feedback and it is truly another to actually listen to that feedback and make adjustments.

Thank you for your time, effort, and enthusiasm for improving education in Ohio.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dale E. Lewellen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dale" being the most prominent.

Dale E Lewellen
Superintendent
Bath Local School District