



The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

**Ohio Education Association Testimony
Ohio's Draft Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Joint Education Oversight Committee
Thursday, March 9, 2017**

Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Sykes and Members of the Joint Education Oversight Committee:

My name is Becky Higgins, I am a first-grade teacher from Copley-Fairlawn City Schools and currently serve as President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of OEA's 124,000 members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Ohio's draft state plan in response to the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The passage of ESSA represents an opportunity to rethink and recalibrate Ohio's education system in a way that better serves the needs of students. However, in several key areas, the state's plan is less than responsive to the concerns and desires expressed by many parents, educators and other stakeholders who provided input. Rather than setting a new course for education in Ohio, the plan essentially embraces the status quo.

OEA has provided suggestions to Superintendent DeMaria on ways to improve the draft plan. My testimony today will address OEA's recommendations on testing, school report cards, teacher evaluation and school improvement. Additionally, OEA has been working with other stakeholder groups on shared priorities and meeting with the Department to provide consensus recommendations.

Testing

During the months of stakeholder engagement that preceded the release of the draft plan, parents, educators, students and community members continually called for a reduction in the amount of testing. However, the state's draft ESSA plan calls for the same number of tests going forward. This is a missed opportunity to further reduce testing in Ohio. OEA encourages the state to reduce the number of required standardized tests to the minimum required by federal law by eliminating social studies tests in grades 4 and 6 and four end-of-course assessments.

ESSA provides opportunities for states to audit and streamline assessment systems. Ohio should actively encourage and support testing audits conducted at the local level to identify and eliminate assessments that are low-quality or duplicative.

OEA is concerned about more than simply the number of tests and the time dedicated to testing. OEA is also concerned about the purpose and use of testing data. According to ODE's online survey, Ohioans overwhelmingly do not believe that test results are a good way to measure the success of



students, schools or teachers. Yet, under the draft plan, test results would continue to dominate our accountability system, play a central role in teacher evaluation and would continue to be used to make high-stakes decisions about students.

School Report Cards

ESSA calls for the inclusion of at least one non-academic indicator of success on school and district report cards. ODE's draft plan calls for using chronic absenteeism as this indicator. Addressing chronic absenteeism is important, but it is a poor measure of student engagement. OEA believes that non-academic indicators should focus on the opportunities provided to students. Examples include class size, access to a well-rounded curriculum, school support services and school safety. Inclusion of such measures would give a balanced view of our schools and provide information that more closely aligns with what respondents to the ODE online survey believe are the most important factors in determining school quality.

Teacher Evaluation

Stakeholder groups representing teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members and parents agree that improvements are needed in Ohio's teacher evaluation system. ESSA does away with the requirement that evaluation systems be linked to student growth. OEA supports the decision to engage the professional expertise of the Ohio Educator Standards Board to provide recommendations on how the Ohio's Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) can be improved. We look forward to working with you and policymakers to act upon these recommendations.

School Improvement

ESSA calls for schools to develop locally-based improvement plans by involving stakeholders (educators, parents and community members) and focusing on student needs. Stakeholders want more local control in this planning and recommend that the school improvement process be less focused on compliance and more focused on quality, evidence-based practices. OEA continues to support the use of the Ohio Improvement Process and the Ohio Leadership Development Framework as an approach to school improvement. Through this process and framework, Ohio's educators can engage in shared leadership and decision-making aimed at improving instructional practices and student achievement.

OEA encourages support for the development of community learning centers as a means for schools to provide wraparound services that meet student and family needs. OEA is encouraged that the plan calls for an incentive to support a resource coordinator to serve as a site leader to coordinate student and family services. However, we are concerned that using a competitive grant process for the distribution of funds may limit the scope of such an incentive.

OEA also encourages Ohio's plan to be far more aggressive in ramping up efforts to expand early childhood education. The evidence is clear that access to quality preschool greatly enhances student success.

Conclusion

Like you, OEA's members care deeply about our students, our schools and our communities. We want to make sure that all our students have an opportunity to succeed. OEA members believe that the passage of ESSA holds a lot of promise. We urge that the state's plan be amended in response to these concerns. It should be noted that several of the recommendations would require changes in state law and are related to ongoing work (such as the efforts of the Educator Standards Board and the High School Graduation Workgroup). OEA's members and staff stand ready to work with Ohio's policy makers to bring about these changes.