

Chairman Representative Cupp, Senator Sykes, and other Joint Education Oversight Committee Members;

I appreciate the time allotted for this hearing and for the opportunity to speak. My name is Kelly Ann Braun.

I am here on behalf of my first grandchild Evelyn; she is so cute and smart, and I just love her so much.

(Show the picture!)

I begin with a demand that the September 18th date for submission to the USED be fully maximized. April 3rd is far too rushed of a deadline for this rough draft to be anywhere near fixed and to full potential.

I am 53 and have had 40 continuous years of teaching children in some capacity or another. I am hoping that today I offer a bit of a different perspective to those charged with the graver responsibility of drafting, overseeing, and enacting this ESSA plan.

Success is so subjective, is it not?

I would like to ask for some participation, if I may, for a minute or two. Yes, this is a test. But no pencils are needed. And I will be kind and not grade you.

A person earns this much in one year's time:

(Show Poster)

Are they a success or not a success?

A person has enough state college credit hours to equal a Master's degree (with A's in their field and more than passing grades in other classes--- C's earn degrees!).

Are they a success or not a success?

A person has yet to obtain the actual diploma.

Are they a success or not a success?

A person is not a homeowner.

Are they a success or not a success?

But, that same person has 5 children, aged 17, 20, 25, 27 and 29, whom she has raised now for 16 years as a single widow. Four out of five of those young adults are literal homeowners.

If you surmised by now that this is me, you are correct.

I am a lead Pre-K teacher for 4/5 year olds in 1 of 2 out of 41 Preschools in the area who are a 4-Star Step-Up-to-Quality Preschool. Our preschool will never be 5-Star for we are too small to have a Board. I resource consumables for my classroom out-of-pocket (yes, that is a ton of playdough, lots of markers, and many glue sticks; easily about \$10 a week.) I have no benefits from this job, except for the very minimal life insurance policy I have in place so my children will not be burdened by the costs of my funeral. That runs me \$17 every two weeks.

To travel from Youngstown today to submit formal written and oral testimony, I gave up 1/10th of my 2-week paycheck. I have no paid days off, ever, for any reason. No sick days. No personal days. No vacation pay. No summers off. On snow days we have our school-agers all day long, whom I also teach, so no snow days either. Add in the cost of gas in my \$800 beater car to journey 6 hours round-trip today, along with the purchase of a drive-thru sandwich and iced liquid caffeine, and I will have spent 18% of half of my month's wages. That amount, around \$70-\$80, is equal to the total amount I usually spend for an entire week of groceries for my family. To be here is no small sacrifice for me. To be here felt imperative as a voice for my progeny, my profession and my pupils.

On page 4 of the pdf of the ESSA framework report, under the title "Leveraging Our Assets to Maximize ESSA and Enhance Student Success", it says:

"Together, these accomplishments provide a platform for taking student success to even greater heights over the next several years." Then under the subtitle Early Childhood, the first bulleted item reads:

"Expanding early childhood education by tripling the number of high quality preschool opportunities for Ohio's most vulnerable students."

So, great news! Three times as many high-quality Pre-K teachers will be needed in Ohio! They will enter the career field, with the required Bachelor's degree, to work forty hours per week, plus volunteer a minimum of ten to fifteen hours per week to build topics of interest for the classroom (traditionally called themes), align lessons to standards, pre-cut projects and get an armload of books from the library, all for a whopping \$9 an hour. Success!

This legislation is important. I see my students' faces when I read through this draft plan. I cringe horribly in my heart for all the undoing that will occur to the solid foundation I have laid for them to think, to read and to love learning. I pray for them by name, though of course I cannot share their identities in here.

My students are the graduating class of 2031. They are this year's autumn kindergarteners.

Here are some of them, (Show the picture!) although I had to blur their faces a tiny bit.

I am here on their behalf; they are so cute and smart and I just love them so much!

“Goodbye” I say at the end of the year, “off you go to your KRA’s (Kindergarten Readiness Assessments)! Please be patient with your new teacher. It will take her at least until the first or second week of November to get through all of the tests. Never mind that you have not gotten used to your new surroundings, other students, routines, or the rules of the room. Never mind that ONLY the teacher can administer the one-on-one test. Get to know the teacher assistant. Watch some Disney movies. The teacher needs to do this for the state. I am not sure you will get recess. Your teacher will get to the real learning just in time for the holidays. Oh, little one, I love you, please have fun!” (*understanding of this mess, courtesy of Janet Garrett, a life-time Kindergarten teacher, who recently retired and ran for Congress!)

Here are just some of the situations in 2016, which plagued these young ones’ lives:

One student came to me unable to recognize any numbers or letters and only about three colors. This child was painfully timid, and awkwardly shy. Given a few months in class, this child learned all of the colors, all of the upper and lower case letters, all number recognition and proper one-to-one correspondence, all the shapes, could write their own name, read sight-words, and completely blossomed socio-emotionally. But tragically, this student and the two younger siblings, along with the mother, had to very suddenly flee the state. The mother had NOT done anything illegal but I am not at liberty to divulge the details the mom shared in confidence. A few weeks later, I received one message via an Instagram through a mutual friend. The child wanted me, Miss Kelly, to listen in on them reading their first book aloud. I’ll likely never see that dear cherub again. I shook and cried as I watched. They may or may not remember me in the future because of their tender age. But I know I was a success at impacting their life of learning.

One parent had their face shot off. That parent lived. Following one visit of many to the hospital, the child relayed a gruesome vision of the parent’s “ugly, scary teeth with blood on them that were not in a smile but over by [the parent’s] ear.” That child shook in my arms as though freezing to death for forty straight minutes. I had nightmares for weeks and just typing this, makes me have to literally pause and calm down again. This child was an emergent reader. But, the trauma set that one back, in a gruff estimate of 1 ½ years to maybe even 2 full years in cognitive skills. One day about to read, the next week, unable to call out the letters of their own name, and wetting the cot at nap. That child no longer attends preschool, at least not in my class.

Another child was removed by the state from their home via a domestically violent situation between the adults and turned completely despondent. When we just barely were making some headway out of that trauma while the child was living with the other parent, I’ll be darned if I did not have to report a black eye with the exact outline of an adult hand. That child just stopped coming to preschool shortly after. I believe that wee one is in Kindergarten now. Two of my students warranted full-blown IEPs. At least three of the single-parent families have parents that work themselves to the bone only to earn a wage that makes my W2 seem like I live the rich life. Only ONE of the 28 families are still the original intact set of birth parents.

When we work with data, and hard sets of numbers, it very quickly becomes cold and impersonal. When we are testing and assessing and generalizing and labeling and categorizing and measuring and standardizing little people--- we are dehumanizing how we think about them. We must always picture

names, faces, and souls. Success is not a number. Screen time does not nurture and foster. Computers do not emote, think or hug. Software never loves. Disruptors of education are disgusting in their greed. And education reformers are woefully out-of-touch.

This ESSA plan, in its current status will not only fall short. It will fail. Not the students, not the teachers, and not the schools, but this policy framework. This ALEC agenda will not ever be successful.

Dear lovers of data, here are some numbers for you---

Tri-Valley 400
Mason 300
Indianola Middle School Columbus 200
New Bremen 75
CMSD 100
Marion Local 145
Kenston Middle School 68
Kenston Intermediary School 50
Lakota 145
Firelands 177
Little Miami 129
Troy 125

I have over a hundred of such numbers to list, but for the sake of time I only offer a random dozen. Do you know what these numbers represent?

They are the OPT OUT numbers from a movement that pulled together in maybe 3-6 months.

Right now, right off of the top of my head, without looking at any lists, I can name at least 20 different groups with 100s and 1000s of members in each. Looking at my lists and lists in various networking arenas, I could easily triple those numbers in a matter of minutes. The sheer numbers make the 15,000 primary stakeholders the drafters of this plan boast about look like a drop in the bucket. They are parent and community groups that formed during our Opt Out activism. I am not talking about PTA/PTO, educator advocacy groups, or band booster groups. I am talking about groups that rose in numbers exponentially seemingly overnight, with fairly little effort, solely concerned with this over-testing obsession.

Sure, sure, Ohio gold-digging reformers in a super haste, put English spin on the game ball, changed PARCC to AIR, and quelled the OPT OUT noise. But I tell you that was all very temporary. They, the fed-up, thoroughly irate parents and students, who are by far and wide the broadest base of primary stakeholders, are ALL waiting to hear from us as we thought that ESSA might help to back down or eliminate this abusive assessment addiction. Ohio has mistakenly pushed us who are passionate about parenting to this point.

I have tons of people all around me, who thought I was nuts four years ago to be screaming warnings

about all of this, who have never in their lives been concerned with politics or education legislation, coming to me with their children's test scores, with tears of frustration and bouts of anger like I have never seen before. It takes me about 2 minutes to encourage them to sign a petition, speak to their superintendents, and write or call their legislators.

This is not just the left, the liberals or the Democrats. This is not just the non-voters (Ohio has a ton of those as we all know all too well), and this is not just the Independents. It, in very high numbers is also the right, the conservatives, and the Republicans. The 'tea party' members who are still abhorring and fighting "Common Core," think these high-stakes tests are all part of "Common Core". So they too were part of the early onset of massive civil disobedience. Ohio is about to meet the united non-partisan grown-up version of it all.

If on or before April 3rd, Ohio sends this ESSA draft as is, to the Department of Education, on April 4th the Opt Out Ohio movement will be restarted. If Ohio delays the sending of the ESSA draft plan until September 18th, but still drowns out the numerous voices of dissension, and changes very little, then on September 19th the Opt Out Ohio shakers and movers will swing into full-force pushback.

The networks and coalitions with other states who have been quite successful with their opt-out numbers, such as New York, are already in place, and strongly built. Ohio will NOT get their needed 95% participation rates, period, the end.

I am Kelly Ann. I am part of the core leadership team of the National Badass Teachers Association, otherwise known as BATs. I am the lead administrator of Ohio BATs. I am admonishing Ohio to respect the wisdom of the ones most in tune with authentic teaching and the true educational needs of Ohio.

Thank you very sincerely for hearing all of this. My prayer is that the audience not only hear, but listen and heed.

