

Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on the Every Student Succeeds Act before you today. What compels me to be here requires a brief historical context.

In 1965, the landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act was enacted. Its main focus was to bring equity to our nation's public schools, as a part of the larger War on Poverty campaign by President Johnson. In 2002, No Child Left Behind, ushered in by President Bush, reauthorized ESEA. The focus of NCLB was to bring accountability to our nation's public schools, partly in response to the inflammatory report called "A Nation at Risk."

I had been teaching for five years when NCLB was enacted. The impact of NCLB did not happen when the law was signed, instead it happened gradually and over time. Student achievement became synonymous with showing growth in students' scores on standardized tests instead of its original intent to measure what students know and are able to do. Accountability was defined by students' scores on standardized tests instead of its original intent to ensure that schools provide a sound and equitable education to all their students. Closing the achievement gap came to mean a narrowed curricula, focused on improving students' scores on standardized tests instead of an equitable educational opportunity for all students. While the intent of NCLB may have been equity in public education, in practice, its policies strangled our local schools and harmed our most vulnerable student populations in the process. What teachers on the frontlines know is that when children come to school starving and traumatized by the impact of poverty they do not test well. Have you ever taken a test when you were hungry?

In 2015, Congress began the work of reauthorizing ESEA after more than a decade under NCLB. During this time, I diligently advocated for policies that would match their intent: I contacted my federal legislators faithfully to share my concerns as well as my vision for public education; I closely followed the debates and votes in both chambers on C-SPAN; with a group of education advocates, I lobbied on behalf of our children and public education with 9 of 18 U.S. legislators' offices.

Last year, when ODE gathered stakeholders' input, I offered my views in every possible way that I could. I participated in the ESSA webinars that were held outside of my contract time, completed surveys, sent additional feedback, attended the regional meeting in Columbus, and read the Ohio draft ESSA plan. I could not miss another opportunity to advocate on behalf of students, educators, and public education.

ESSA provides states with the most important, and most frequently overlooked, aspect of any legislation regarding public education: Involving the experts in the formulation of policies that govern it. While Ohio did a fair job of getting feedback and input from primary stakeholders, the draft plan does not address most of what 15,000 Ohioans who participated said was important to

them. If this input is ignored, ESSA will become another failed piece of legislation that lacks educator input and instead of an opportunity to make meaningful changes for our children, we will have squandered their future.

One example of a missed opportunity in Ohio's draft ESSA plan is maintaining the status-quo of state testing. Ohioans have clearly expressed a desire for the state to lessen state tests to the federally-required minimums. That translates into eliminating 7 tests Ohio uses beyond those required by ESSA. While I understand that ODE does not have the authority to change state law, I believe that waiting to submit the plan in September would allow time for the Ohio General Assembly to act to reduce the 7 required state tests beyond what ESSA requires, and time for this information to be included in the draft plan.

Another missed opportunity in Ohio's draft ESSA plan is in choosing to use chronic absenteeism and student discipline incidents as the non-academic indicator for reporting on the state report card. Educators know that one of the most powerful impacts of poverty on our children is absenteeism and a high rate of suspensions. The majority of Ohioans who provided input stressed the importance of schools addressing the growing needs of our children and their families who are living in conditions of poverty. Many stakeholders like myself expressed a desire to expand wrap-around services to schools who serve a majority of students who are living in poverty. The consideration here should be on meeting the needs of students. An indicator for this could simply report the ratio of the number of specialists and services provided for students in each subgroup to the total student enrollment of each subgroup in a school or district.

This leads to a bigger concern involving how the discussion of accountability focuses solely on the outputs, such as scores on standardized tests, graduation rates, and soon, absenteeism. Of course educational outputs like those above are important. But, for far too long the accountability for students, educators, and their schools has relied solely on identified outputs. I would like to see accountability for the inputs to our public schools. Nowhere in this plan are our federal legislators charged with fully funding Title grants held accountable. Nowhere in this plan are our state legislators charged with "thorough and efficient" funding of our public schools held accountable. Nowhere in this plan are our state board members held accountable for eliminating bare-minimum requirements for specialists under the former 5 of 8 Rule. Nowhere in this plan is Governor Kasich held accountable, despite a multitude of funding cuts and policies harmful to education. Just as I will be held accountable for my students' scores on their 6th Grade ELA AIR Assessment, those who make decisions about public education policy should be held accountable for the impact of their starvation policies upon our children.

Similarly, I am concerned about the reduction of n-size from 30 to 15 students. This is another example of how intent can be distorted in practice. While the lower n-size for subgroup reporting

is supposed to provide increased federal funds, we have yet to realize full funding from Congress. Further, I worry this change will reinforce the testing culture that has driven our schools under NCLB. If even more of our most vulnerable student populations do not meet proficiency on standardized tests, they will have a greater negative impact on the district/school Performance Index Score. We know that every child is capable of learning and is deserving of a full and robust education, despite their scores on standardized tests. This fundamental belief is inherent in our educational system. We must stop giving credence to the argument that students' scores on standardized tests are the primary indicator of a school's or district's success or failure. In fact, as educators we know that our children are more than a score - they are musicians, they are artists, and they have gifts that no standardized test can measure. We need to begin to index all of the great things that our schools can, and do, for our children.

Ohio's draft ESSA plan does not address how the state will respond to changes in requirements for teacher evaluations. Again, I understand that OTES is state law, but given that federal regulations no longer require states to tie teacher evaluation to students' scores on standardized tests, it is unacceptable that Ohio is continuing with the status-quo. If the best possible suggestion is further discussion, then why not delay the plan's submission until September? Five months is sufficient time for the Ohio General Assembly to enact changes to OTES that align with ESSA requirements.

In closing, I am posing two requests to you. First and foremost, I urge a delay in the submission of Ohio's draft ESSA plan to the September deadline. This may be a draft plan, but it holds much significance in the lives of our students and their schools. It must not be rushed. It must be done in such a way that we know will have the most positive impact on our children. Our children are worth the investment of slowing down and getting it right. Lastly, but also importantly, I respectfully request that in matters of policy regarding public education, the experts are consulted.

I am fortunate enough to have the job I have always dreamed of; and truly, with all due respect, ours is the greatest job in the world. We have the privilege and the honor of expanding the understandings and development of young people. We have the joy of sharing in their successes, the sorrow of their struggles, the laughter of their souls, the compassion of their hearts. We never stop being humbled by the awesome responsibilities we face in guiding our nation's future each day. We never stop caring for them, loving them, and advocating for what is best for them. We are their voices carried to you. Educators are on the frontlines every day for our children. I hope and pray that I will honor the faith they place in me to do right by them. I hope and pray that those who are in charge will do their best to do right by them too.