

Joint Education Oversight Committee
Testimony on Ohio's draft plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act
Peggy Giuliano, 6th grade teacher from Newton Falls
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Good afternoon. My name is Peggy Giuliano and I am a sixth grade teacher from Newton Falls in Trumbull County way up in the northeast part of the state. Thank you so much for your time today and for allowing me to participate in this conversation.

I've taken the time to come here today because I believe strongly that it is important for you all as the people who will determine policies for our public schools to hear first hand from someone like myself who works in a school with children every day. I am excited by the opportunity for Ohio to develop a vision for public education that will meet the increasing needs of students while also creating greater potential for their future. I'm talking about the opportunities available through the Every Student Succeeds Act - ESSA.

I am concerned that Ohio's draft ESSA plan does not go deep enough into addressing the root causes that impact student learning. The focus in the current draft plan is primarily on testing and measuring without developing strategies for how to deal with the negative impact that poverty is having on our children.

As a teacher in an Ohio classroom every day I can tell you that the needs of students are becoming more complex. I can tell you that obstacles to learning are far greater than in past years. The impact of poverty is a severe issue for families in my community as in communities large and small across the state. We are located in a more rural setting than a Columbus or Cleveland, certainly, but we are dealing with some of the same crushing problems that you find in communities and schools in Ohio's larger cities. Drug abuse is at a critical level in and around Newton Falls. The economy has yet to recover, leaving many families struggling financially because one or both parents cannot find jobs. Crime. Hunger. Health problems.

Students are coming to school more often than not bearing the weight of issues from home as obstacles to their ability to focus on learning.

Teachers in Newton Falls deal with these issues on a daily basis without the resources and support services we need to fully address the needs. We have one part-time guidance counselor for kindergarten through grade six. She is available to the building with kindergarten through third grade for just a half day, three days a week; the same for the building with grades four through six, a half day, three days a week

Our one school nurse services all three schools buildings in our district and can spend only about 2 hours in each building every day. If an emergency arises she may not be able to spend the regularly planned time in each of the buildings.

We also have many students in our classrooms who are dealing with social emotional needs. Lack of funding means most regular classroom teachers have not had training to help these children when a situation occurs. Lack of funding means our part-time counselor is likely to be unavailable when situations arise in our classrooms. I teach sixth grade. There are three students in grade six identified with social emotional needs, and I am the only one on our side of the building with the crisis management and restraint training required to deal with something if it would occur. Lack of funding for training means students may not get the help they need. Even if all teachers had the training though, students still need access to various support services to address the root causes on many of their issues, whether the issues be social emotional, physical, or other types of problems.

While the current ESSA draft does deal with training around behavioral issues, it does not address how to ensure that students have access to other support services they need. There are references to student services. We believe that there are at least two areas in the plan where more emphasis could be put on addressing root problems that impact learning.

First, we recommend inclusion of support for a Community Learning Center model in the section 6.1 – entitled Well-Rounded and Supportive Education for all Students. On pages 90-91, ODE specifically mentions two initiatives – Implementation of the PBIS Framework and Collaborating States Initiative with CASEL. Under both sections, the department mentions providing resources, professional learning, holding conferences to expand awareness, and developing resources and tools. Both of these programs are worthy of inclusion in an ESSA plan, but both also focus on standards and training around behavioral programs. We would like to see the same type of resources and promotion around a Community Learning Center model where community partnerships are formed to bring access to needed services inside our schools. I have limited knowledge of this model myself, but from the little I have heard from my colleagues in Cincinnati, this kind of approach to addressing student needs sounds like what we need in Newton Falls. A state ESSA plan that focuses on expanding these types of programs rather than on focusing primarily on testing and measuring would create a paradigm shift that would go a long way to putting our students on a path to success.

Another place to insert the importance of providing resources to meet student needs is under section 5.1 – Educator Development, Retention, and Advancement and section 5.2 – Support for Educators. Part of the frustration that the teachers I currently work with feel is that they are trying to deal with so many issues that are outside of their scope of work, that they are overwhelmed and cannot even focus on teaching content. Providing support services in schools would alleviate that burden and allow teachers to focus on what they are educated to do – teach children. This will help keep quality teachers in the classroom and help in recruiting new teachers.

The Every Student Succeeds Act gives us the opportunity to address both the increasing needs of students and obstacles to learning. But we need Ohio to create a vision for public education that addresses these kinds of things. The draft ESSA plan is largely status quo and overemphasizes testing and measuring without addressing the root causes impacting performance. I urge Ohio to not submit this plan next month, but to take the time to collaborate with educators to create a vision for our children and submit a better plan by the September deadline.

Thank you so much for your time. That concludes my testimony.