



Joint Education Oversight Committee
ESSA State Plan Testimony
Presented by Melissa Cropper, President
Ohio Federation of Teachers
March 9, 2017

Chair Cupp, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Joint Education Oversight Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to talk with you about ESSA – The Every Student Succeeds Act. I am Melissa Cropper, a library media specialist from Georgetown, Ohio currently on leave to serve as the President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers.

ESSA was signed into law on Dec. 15, 2015. This historic reauthorization of ESEA was a bi-partisan decision to give states flexibility while still holding them accountable to some measures. At the heart of the legislation was an imperative for states and locals to engage stakeholders in thinking beyond what the federal government had been dictating and to look instead at the needs of the states and locals and to be intentional about how to move states towards results in a way that federal mandates had not been able to do.

In other words, it created the opportunity for stakeholders within a state to re-imagine how to reach our vision that all students will be successful.

Doing so, however, requires courageous leadership from all involved, whether it be the state superintendent, the Governor, the General Assembly, the State Board, state organizations like the Ohio Federation of Teachers, parent groups, advocacy groups, or local educators. This is a time when we all need to come together to have the difficult conversation about how to change our culture in Ohio from one that, due to federal guidelines, had been overly focused on testing, measuring, sorting, and ranking to a culture that focuses on addressing the root issues in our system that are impacting results.

States have been very similar in many aspects of stakeholder engagement. Most, like Ohio, have held regional meetings, done webinars, and met with multiple stakeholder groups to get input on the plan. Some states, fifteen of the eighteen submitting in April, have taken it a step farther to have a state ESSA team and/or workgroups that convened on each section and then built consensus around the

best way to move forward. An example of a state which did this well is Colorado. We have attached their process for your review.

This consensus-building step is the step which OFT would still like to see Ohio take which would require not submitting in April but rather choosing the September deadline.

We commend the department for all the time and work they have put into the current plan. Superintendent DeMaria has been very diligent in attending meetings across the state and engaging people in conversations, and others in the department have spent countless hours meeting with groups, collecting feedback, analyzing it and fitting it into a template. We in no way want to diminish the work that they have done. We believe though that bringing together a team to create consensus about the direction in which our state needs to move is a critical step that is currently missing. Instead, the department has been the sole arbitrator of what needs to change and what does not need to change, and as a result, you are hearing the outcry of people who feel as if they have not been heard.

Much discussion has been had about whether the ESSA plan is an opportunity to set a vision for the state or if it is simply a set of technical questions that need to be answered for compliance purposes. The Ohio Federation of Teachers has always maintained that you cannot adequately answer any questions without knowing what you want the end goal to be. The Council of Chief State School Officers, which is the national organization for state superintendents, appears to also take this approach. In March 2016, they released a *State Strategic Vision Guide*. The first section in this guide is *Articulate State Vision and Priorities*. The second section is *Identify Opportunities for ESSA to Support State Priorities*. In February 2017, they issued another document titled *Developing a Comprehensive State Plan pursuant to the Every Student Succeeds Act: A Tool for Structuring Your Plan*. In the overview, it states that “this guide is intended to support your state in moving beyond the traditional compliance-oriented approaches for responding to federal requirements.”

The guides call upon leaders to consider their theory of change – if we do X then Y will occur. When OFT looks at the current draft for the Ohio plan, it appears to us that the theory of action is this – if we test and measure then students will be successful. Our conversations with members across the state though indicate that this theory of action does not work. We hear repeatedly three major concerns:

- Children have an increasing number of unmet needs that are impacting their ability to learn
- Children are disconnected from the true value of learning and see the end result as a test score.
- Educator morale is very low which is impacting the ability to attract and retain high quality teachers.

With that in mind, our theory of change is this:

IF we

- Focus on student well-being
- Promote powerful learning
- Build teacher capacity and
- Foster collaboration

THEN students will be better equipped for a successful future.

We maintain that these pieces can be woven into an ESSA plan. Here are some examples of where it can be done.

Focus on student well-being

- Decrease the amount of testing (Section 3)
- Decrease the impact of test results in the accountability system and create measures that focus on student opportunity and well-being (ex- access to support services) (Section 4)
- Support the expansion of the community learning centers across Ohio and not just in schools identified for improvement. (Section 6.1)
- Expand the composition of cross-agency and inter-agency teams to include educators and other service providers. Also expand scope of this work beyond behavioral issues to also include how to bring in community resources to address mental, social, and physical issues)

Promote powerful learning

- Ensure access to the arts, music, quality library services, electives (Section 6.1B)
- Reduce the impact of testing in the accountability system so that districts reduce the amount of time spent on practice tests and test prep. (Section 4) and focus more on project-based learning, connecting students with authentic learning experiences outside the classroom, etc.
- Re-design OTEs to increase emphasis on professional growth, designing and delivering quality lessons, using high quality data (including test results) to inform instruction, etc and eliminate the impact of high stakes tests results. (Section 5.1C)

Build teacher capacity

- Support and resource districts for Peer Assistance and Review programs (Section 5.2)
- Resource districts for quality mentoring programs (Section 5.1B)
- Support and promote job-embedded teacher-delivered professional learning in assessment literacy, use of high quality data, formative assessments, family and community engagement and other important topics. (Section 5.2)

- Create career pathways for paraprofessionals to help address teacher diversity issue (Section 5.1B)

Foster Collaboration

- Expand community learning center model (Section 6.1)
- Provide support and training for parent/family engagement
- Create statewide table for continuing discussion around development and implementation of ESSA plan as well as future ESSA issues. (Section 2.2B)

We could, and have, offer many more examples of what could be included in this plan, but we still maintain that the best step forward is to bring stakeholders together to discuss all these areas and to collaboratively decide what is the best route for Ohio. We urge that the state look at this ESSA plan in a broader context and not see this just as a compliance measure. We are concerned that if the state takes the approach that we are going to be compliant and not visionary, then districts, when completing their plans, will take the same approach. This compliant-driven approach is detrimental to our students. We continue to ask the state to wait until September to submit this plan and to use the additional time to bring together a team to review stakeholder feedback, develop a vision based on that, and use the plan to drive towards that vision.

Thank you for your time. I will attempt to answer any questions you might have.