

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Hite, Ranking Member Sawyer and members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Becky Higgins and I serve as President of the Ohio Education Association. I would like to begin by thanking you, Chair Lehner, and the other members of the committee for holding these in-depth hearings on the issue of testing. Additionally, I view the announcement of the Senate Advisory Committee on Testing as extremely positive. It's clear that you are listening to the concerns of students, parents and educators and are committed to taking action.

As I talk to teachers from around the state the number one issue that comes up is testing. They are beyond frustrated with the increasing amount of time spent on testing and the way it has crowded out time needed to teach and engage students in dynamic ways. They tell me about the anxiety felt by their students and the growing number of parents who are considering having their children "opt out" of tests. There is a fundamental imbalance that needs to be corrected.

As policymakers examine changes to testing, OEA calls for a focus on the following priorities:

1. **Reduce the amount of time spent on testing:** There is too much time devoted to testing. It's crowding out time for teaching and learning, limiting student engagement and narrowing our curriculum. The disproportionate time spent on testing is being felt by students, parents and educators. It's time to focus more clearly on our students and their needs.
2. **Address problems with the tests:** The transition to the new tests, including PARCC, is producing mixed results at best. A myriad of issues have been raised including technology, lack of timely guidance, tests not properly aligned to standards, age appropriateness of tests, insufficient accommodations for special education students and a lack of timely results from the assessment. These problems must be fixed.
3. **Use data appropriately to focus on helping students:** Timely data from testing should be used to inform instruction, advance student learning and promote the growth of educators in their practice. It is not appropriate to tie high-stakes decisions to testing results.
4. **Allow time to get implementation right:** As Ohio makes the transition to new standards and assessments, there needs to be sufficient time to make adjustments. OEA renews its call for policy makers to hit the pause button and extend to 3 years a moratorium on the use of student test scores in measuring student growth, evaluating teacher performance and any adverse consequence on local schools.

## **Testing Report Recommendations**

I want to commend Superintendent Ross for his recommendations on testing and for reaching out for input from teachers. His report outlines a number of things that can be done by ODE without the need for legislative remedies. OEA supports these actions which would include improvements to the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and ODE's advocacy for greater flexibility in testing from the federal level.

OEA welcomes a number of legislative recommendations on testing that are part of the report. The two percent cap on testing time in a school year and one percent cap on time to prepare for tests are positive proposals. We believe that setting an upper limit will help reduce the time spent on testing. Less time on testing means more time for teaching and learning. OEA also sees merit in the recommendations to eliminate the fall administration of the third grade reading test, while providing an opportunity to take the test in the summer and alternative assessments for those who need them. OEA supports and the recommendation to no longer require math and writing diagnostic tests in grades 1-3.

While these are all moves in the right direction, if enacted on their own, they may not produce the reduction in testing time that is needed. As the committee has heard, the scheduling of state-mandated tests lays havoc to school schedules for weeks at a time. We hope further examination and adjustments will produce tests and procedures that make testing less time-consuming while meeting student needs.

## **Teacher Evaluation**

OEA does not support the recommendation in Dr. Ross' report to effectively eliminate student learning objectives (SLOs) for many teachers and replace it with shared attribution. OEA recommends maintaining the current local option of using SLOs or shared attribution in teacher evaluations when there is no value-added data or approved vendor test available. While OEA encourages more guidance from ODE on the best practices for using shared attribution, mandating the use of shared attribution would likely create more problems with teacher evaluations at the local level than it would resolve with over-testing.

There are a variety of pros and cons to SLOs and shared attribution. Local school districts and teachers may consider either approach more or less preferable. However, the fact that SLOs are the prevailing choice sends the signal that most consider this approach to be more accurate, fair and equitable as compared with shared attribution. Therefore, overruling what appears to be a local consensus that SLO's are more effective than shared attribution could exacerbate ongoing frustration with the over-use of student growth measures in Ohio's Teacher Evaluation System (OTES).

As an alternative, OEA recommends a reassessment of the role that student growth measures play in teacher evaluations. The quandary of how and when to use SLO's or shared attribution is really a symptom of a teacher evaluation system that is out-of-balance and needs reform. The real question is not which student growth measure to use, it is why and how they are being used in the first place. At a minimum, OEA calls for a significant reduction in the percentage of teacher evaluation that relies on measures of student growth through testing. The Senate has passed such a reduction in the past with overwhelming bi-partisan support.

In closing, OEA believes it is important to limit both the time spent on testing and the use of test results to make high-stakes decisions. The current fixation with testing is sucking the oxygen out of our education system. Students, parents and educators are saying enough is enough.

Chair Lehner, thank you for the opportunity to testify. We stand ready to work with you on this important issue. I'd be happy to answer questions from the committee.