

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
HB 73: OEA Proponent Testimony
Wednesday, May 12, 2021

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the Committee:

My name is Jeff Wensing. I have 26 years of experience as a high school math teacher in the Parma City Schools; and I currently serve as Vice President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of the 120,000 members of OEA, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 73.

I would like to begin by thanking the joint sponsors, Representatives Gayle Manning and Erica Crawley, as well as the bi-partisan cosponsors of HB 73. Over-testing is an issue that has been acutely felt by Ohio's parents, teachers, and students. Standardized testing takes time away from classroom instructional time. The hyper-focus on test results has led to a narrowing of curriculum and fewer educational opportunities for students. High-stakes decisions tied to test results have led to testing anxiety. I'm sure you've heard concerns like these, and will no doubt hear more as you consider this bill.

Reducing testing is a worthy goal. For the past few General Assemblies, Ohio's policy makers have eliminated a number of state-required tests. HB 73 continues this work. To be clear, there will still be state-required and district-required testing if this bill is enacted. However, a reduction in the number of state-required tests and a thoughtful review of testing at the local level will help to restore balance to our classrooms. Simply put, less time devoted to standardized testing means more time for teaching and learning.

OEA enthusiastically supports HB 73. Following is a review of the major provisions of the bill.

Reducing State-Required Testing

Federal law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), requires a total of 17 tests for accountability purposes. These include annual testing in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math in grades 3-8 as well as once in high school. Further, the law requires testing in science once in elementary school, middle school and high school.

Ohio currently has 20 state-required achievement or end-of-course tests. In grades 3-8 the state-required tests mostly align with federal minimums with the addition of a second administration of the third grade ELA test. However, Ohio has a total of five end-of-course exams in high school; exceeding the federal minimums by two tests. HB 73 would eliminate one end-of-course

exam by combining the American History and American Government tests into a single exam. Additionally, HB 73 would limit the third grade ELA test to a single administration.

OEA supports the reduction of state-required testing in HB 73. Further, OEA believes there is merit in seeking additional flexibility from the federal testing requirements. It should be noted that the recent round of testing waivers granted to states by the federal government have signaled further testing reductions are possible. For example, Colorado is moving to an every-other-year testing regime where every student will take ELA one year and math the next.

Work Groups on District-Required Testing

The amount of testing that students endure is not limited to the state-required tests. Testing required by the school district also plays a major role. The bill requires each school district to form a work group to examine the amount of time students spend on district-required testing and make recommendations to the district board of education about how to reduce the testing load on students.

This work group would consist of parents, teachers and school administrators. In making their recommendations, the work group would consider: the time students spend on district-required testing, the district testing calendar, whether groups of students are tested at a greater rate than others, the purpose and use of tests and testing data, the financial cost to the district, and whether any tests are duplicative. The work group would also consider any previous testing audit or examination of testing that the district may have already performed.

OEA believes there is great value in having this discussion at the district level. It can lead to recommendations that reduce testing time, save money and return instructional time to the classroom. It can also lead to a greater understanding among stakeholders as to the purpose and value of testing that is currently in place. OEA feels it is vitally important that teachers and parents are a central part of this conversation and strongly supports this provision of the bill.

Annual Board Resolution for Districts that Exceed Testing Caps

Current law establishes a cap on testing time. Senate Bill 3, passed in the 131st General Assembly, states that school districts should ensure that no student is required to spend a cumulative amount of time in excess of 2% of the school year taking state-required or district-required assessments or 1% of the school year taking practice or diagnostic tests to prepare for testing. However, the local board of education may exceed those limits by passing a resolution after holding a public meeting.

At present it is unclear how many school boards have passed such a resolution. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) does not track this information. Districts that are exceeding the testing caps may have passed a resolution as a one-time action or possibly not taken the action at all.

HB 73 would require an annual passage of such a resolution if the district is exceeding testing caps. Also, the bill would require the local school board to consider recommendations of the local work group consisting of parents, teachers and administrators. Such resolutions would be reported to the Department and ODE would issue an annual report on student testing time. This report will help to quantify how much time students are spending on testing and will help inform policymakers at the state and local level.

Eliminating Student Retention Under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee

HB 73 would remove the high-stakes associated with the 3rd grade ELA test by eliminating student retention requirements of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. OEA strongly believes that retention and promotion decisions should be made by local educators rather than based on a single standardized test score. Importantly, the bill would maintain the requirements for diagnostic reading tests in kindergarten through second grades to identify students who are reading below grade level and provide intervention services to struggling readers.

Voluntary Participation in the ACT/SAT

Current law prescribes that the ACT or SAT be administered to all 11th grade students each spring. It is a great benefit to students that the state offers a paid administration of a college entrance exam. However, if a student's post-secondary plans do not include college (for instance a student enrolled in a career-technical program) then taking the ACT or SAT goes from a benefit to just another test they're required to take.

HB 73 would require that the ACT/SAT is offered to 11th grade students but that participation of students would be voluntary. OEA supports this change.

Chair Manning, once again thank you for the opportunity to testify. There is a great deal of support and enthusiasm for reducing testing among OEA's membership that is shared by students and parents around Ohio. OEA urges favorable consideration of HB 73.

I would be happy to answer questions at this time.