



**Testimony to Senate Education
February 25, 2015
The Ohio 8 Coalition**

**Superintendent Lori Ward, Dayton Public Schools and Ohio 8 Coalition Co-Chair
Julie Sellers, President of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers**

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Hite, Ranking Member Sawyer, and members of the Senate Education Committee, on behalf of The Ohio 8 Coalition we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony related to Senate Bill 3. My name is Julie Sellers, President of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers and member of the Ohio 8 Coalition and joining me is Lori Ward, the Superintendent of Dayton Public Schools and The Ohio 8 Coalition Co-chair. Both of us are here today to ensure we offer this committee a unified school administrator and Union President perspective on issues that cut across components of not only SB 3 but similar provisions within the as introduced Executive Operating Budget as well as the Ohio Department of Education's report on state testing limits.

While we understand that this legislation, and the testing conversation in general, covers many topics related to testing, it is The Ohio 8 Coalition's goal to provide recommendations specifically related to the following:

- Student learning objectives (SLOs);
- The fall administration of the third grade reading assessment;
- State mandated testing caps; and
- High-Stakes testing strategy development

Student Learning Objectives

Our districts have invested significant time, energy, and resources to support student-learning objectives and as such **it is our recommendation that SLOs be maintained in their current framework.**

Although not perfect, it is the system we have been working with for just one full school year and we believe that there should be a consistent system in place to avoid policy that is an ongoing moving target. Rather than including a yet-to-be-defined replacement policy in legislation, the Ohio 8 Coalition recommends that a policy be developed, proposed, vetted by practitioners (including those from The Ohio 8 Coalition), and then implemented over time to allow acclimation at the administration and building levels. In the interim, districts that want to maintain their investment and use of SLOs should be allowed to do so. Many of our districts have formal strategies in place that have implemented SLOs in a successful manner. We request the ability to continue this work to maintain consistency and preserve the investment within our districts for something that is working.

The Ohio 8 Coalition appreciates that SLOs have been part of an ongoing dialogue related to deregulating high-performing school districts and if those districts want to eliminate SLOs we encourage the ability for districts to make that local decision. We only ask for the same flexibility to keep what works for our districts and to preserve the investment made in our strategies up to this point in time to best support the students we serve.

Fall Administration of the Third Grade Reading Assessment

The Ohio 8 Coalition would like to maintain the fall administration of the third grade reading assessment. This fall benchmarking opportunity is critical to the Ohio 8 districts from an administrative, educator, parent, and student perspective.

Maintaining the fall administration of the assessment ensures that school district administrators and educators have the ability to guide and tailor instruction to the unique needs of their students from the **beginning** of the school year. In addition, the fall assessment provides a baseline allowing for a true apples-to-apples comparison between the fall and spring assessment. As a teacher this allows for clear and defined trajectory to be established for that student for the year ahead instead of waiting until the spring assessment.

Superintendent Ward will share with you some additional perspective related to this assessment as well as The Ohio 8 Coalition's recommendations related to testing caps.

Thank you Julie. Committee members. In addition to the benefits gained for students, the fall administration of the third grade reading assessment provides a unique opportunity for robust engagement among the teacher, parent and child early on in the school year. It establishes an expectation among all parties from the start and allows for ongoing communication related to that initial assessment for the balance of the school year. It also allows us to engage the broader community on the relevance and critical nature of not only the assessment but also progress and outcomes related to it. All Ohio 8 districts have seen gains in their 3rd grade reading results. There is certainly more work to be done but at this juncture the community has an expectation that we will improve year after year and an apples to apples comparison between fall and spring will help support community, parent, teacher and student engagements.

As with the SLOs the Ohio 8 Coalition appreciates the conversation around deregulation of school districts but requests that to meet our local need, and allow our districts to maintain the fall third grade reading assessment. We further recommend that this assessment be held outside of any testing caps that might be established within this legislation.

State Mandated Testing Caps

The Ohio 8 Coalition has concerns related to the testing cap recommendations outlined in SB 3, the executive budget, and ODE's testing report. The caps outlined do not seem to have a research-based rationale behind them, meaning it is not necessarily based on what best supports students but seemingly an arbitrary number that is loosely tied to the average amount of testing currently administered across the state.

Additionally, we are concerned that the percentage caps, since they are based on a district's school year, may result in inconsistent testing limits across the state. (2% of a school year does not mean the same thing to all districts).

ODE's report includes a 3% testing cap, for prep and administration that seems to be an arbitrary decision. From the perspective of The Ohio 8 Coalition, any caps should be based on the needs of our student populations and aligned with the real purpose of testing, to assess student achievement. **Therefore, it is The Ohio 8 Coalition's recommendation that any testing or test prep caps apply only to state mandated assessments and that districts be allowed to exceed caps based on student needs.** Our districts certainly want to limit time used for testing and preparation in order to provide as much classroom instruction time possible but we also believe that some students simply need additional time and want the local flexibility to do what is best for those students. We know that special needs students are held outside the cap but we request additional flexibility for those students who are typically developing but just might need a little extra preparation.

We believe that every classroom learning moment prepares students for success and such success will be measured through assessments. As a result, it is critical that testing limits be developed in a way that is meaningful and not arbitrary. In order to best serve the unique needs of every student it is critical that local districts continue to determine the necessary levels of testing and test prep. **We further recommend that any limits on local testing be guidelines and not mandated by the state.**

High-Stakes Testing Strategy Development

Finally, the Ohio 8 Coalition encourages this committee to elevate the statewide conversations related to high-stakes testing by establishing an advisory commission or taskforce that includes practitioners from rural, urban, and suburban school districts. We recommend that this commission work to develop a statewide framework that helps Ohio

- Step away from high-stakes testing;
- Allow for districts to monitor and measure student growth in a strategic manner through local assessments;
- Maintain accountability for teacher performance;
- Establish consistent requirements across the state (based on what needs to be assessed not a percentage of the school district's calendar); and
- Considers the total testing burden from the lens of the testing schedule not just the overall quantity.

We thank you for the opportunity to share these recommendations and look forward to continuing to help in any way we can as you work on this legislation. We are both happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Ohio 8 is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio's eight urban school districts – Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown. The Ohio 8 Coalition's mission is to work with policy makers to improve academic performance, increase graduation rates and close the achievement gap for urban children throughout Ohio. The Coalition carries out its mission by working closely with legislators, educators, parents, labor and community officials. The Coalition brings a shared administrator-teacher voice to help shape state education policy.