

**Testimony on Testing in Ohio  
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Ohio House Education and Career Readiness Committee  
Representative Andrew Brenner, Chair

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Ohio Department of Education

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today regarding testing. I am Paolo DeMaria, superintendent of public instruction and head of the Ohio Department of Education.

Our vision for Ohio's education system is that every student receives a high-quality education that prepares them for success in life, careers and future learning. To achieve this vision, we must ensure that every child is receiving the support needed to learn and grow each year. We do this by creating a state policy framework and promoting and supporting effective educational practices by schools and districts. Among these policies and practices are those that allow us to monitor and measure how well our students are acquiring the skills and knowledge, described by Ohio's Learning Standards, that we know they need to be successful. Ohio's assessment system serves as that monitoring and measuring function, allowing us to understand the education system's performance while informing policy and strategy development, striving toward system improvement.

I am here today to provide you with an overview of the testing landscape in Ohio, the issues that are surfacing around it and our plan for addressing those issues. My presentation will include the following:

- Why do students take tests and what tests are used?
- Ohio's testing history
- How much time do students spend taking tests?
- What are we hearing from students, teachers and families about testing?
- Key takeaways and next steps

Before I go further, I want to make it clear that we have heard the comments and frustrations about testing from educators, parents and others. While I believe in the importance of a meaningful statewide assessment system, I also realize that our students, teachers, schools and districts are more complex than any test will ever recognize. Our tests have value, but also need to be viewed through the lens of what is reasonable and worth the time they take away from teaching and learning. The Department and I are committed to improving testing efficiency and reducing the testing burden on students, while maintaining appropriate accountability for our schools and the education system.

**Why do students take tests and what tests are used?**

We all have our own experiences with tests and testing. If we think back far enough, our own first experience with a test likely was a teacher giving us a quiz after a lesson. We also remember mid-terms and final exams. The grade we got on these tests typically influenced the grade we got in the class. We received a report card with our grades, which went to our parents. Tests were largely about measuring and grading students.

We've come a long way from there. Teachers still give their own tests to students, but now districts, the state and even the federal government are in the mix. Let's review through the various lenses of teachers, districts,

the state and the federal government the purposes that tests serve and which tests are used for which purpose.

**Teachers:** Teacher tests are those created or selected by educators for use in their classrooms. Educators use the evidence provided by classroom tests to guide their teaching each day and to guide their professional growth throughout their careers. If students can demonstrate mastery of the knowledge presented, a teacher knows that those students are ready to move on to the next lesson. If students show a lack of understanding, the teacher can address the students' needs before proceeding. The results of assessments also help teachers identify improvement opportunities in their own practices, perhaps motivating them to explore ways to better differentiate instruction or try new ways to engage students and support student knowledge acquisition.

Teacher-designed tests are typically shorter than other types of assessments. These assessments, such as chapter tests, quizzes or final exams, are directly linked to a classroom lesson. Such tests can be administered quite frequently. Teachers are increasingly using multiple modes to conduct these assessments. Examples of this include: student whiteboards, computerized polling, exit tickets and performance-based assessments. In some cases, students don't even know they're being assessed.

**Districts:** Districts adopt and administer certain tests because they have legitimate interests in measuring the overall performance of their school systems and of individual schools. They also monitor the progress made by students at various points throughout the academic year. When properly aligned to Ohio's Learning Standards, district tests help administrators understand how well students are learning the standards, which will ultimately prepare them for state assessments. Districts use data from tests to guide policy decisions and strategies for improvement.

Some district tests are locally created or selected to support a district-specific goal or measure the outcome of a district's programmatic offering, which is not related to any state requirements. The most common of these tests are those offered by commercial vendors, including STAR Assessments, NWEA MAP tests, and Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate tests. These tests are administered less frequently than teacher-designed tests.

The second type of district tests are those used to meet specific state requirements. Ohio law includes several policies and initiatives that require tests but allow districts to select the tests from an approved list. For example, state law allows districts to choose tests for:

- Teacher evaluations;
- Third Grade Reading Guarantee (K-3 diagnostic tests and alternative assessments);
- Gifted student identification.

To meet these requirements, districts choose from a number of commercial vendor assessments, including Terra Nova and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. In some cases, districts can design their own assessments.

**State:** The state has a legitimate interest in understanding how well students are meeting Ohio's Learning Standards. State tests are prescribed in state law and administered to public school students statewide. They provide information about the performance of the overall state system and at the individual district and school levels. Some of the tests also serve to comply with federal requirements.

Ohio's state tests are directly aligned to Ohio's Learning Standards, which outline what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level. Because of this alignment, the state assessments provide a **uniform** way to measure districts against a defined set of expectations. The results of these assessments allow the state to gauge whether the system is providing students, teachers, schools and districts the support they need to be successful. They also can be used to support policy and strategy development in furtherance of system improvement.

State tests are used to support the state's accountability system. These test results are the foundation of Ohio's school and district report cards, which are designed to show parents, taxpayers and school leaders how well students are performing. Additionally, the report card identifies schools and districts that require additional support and intervention. The state provides individual student assessment results to parents so they can better understand their children's academic performance measured in a uniform manner.

State tests also are used to advance two critical state policies in Ohio law. The first is the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Students who cannot read at grade level by the end of the third grade are four times more likely to eventually drop out of school. The guarantee uses annual tests to monitor whether a student will be reading at the third-grade level by the time he or she completes third grade and to ensure the student will learn on pace in higher grades. Students whose reading is not on track by the end of third grade receive extra support until they catch up and are ready for the fourth grade.

The second critical policy involves expectations for what knowledge and skills students should demonstrate as a condition for being granted a diploma. Each of the three current diploma pathways includes the use of the results of one or more assessments.

To support these purposes, Ohio administers 26 tests to students throughout their K-12 careers including:

- Kindergarten: Kindergarten Readiness Assessment;
- Grade 3-8: English language arts (ELA)\*, math\*;
- Grade 4 and 6: social studies;
- Grade 5 and 8: science\*;
- High school end-of-course exams: in Algebra (or Integrated Math I), Geometry (or Integrated Math II), ELA I, ELA 2, Biology, American History and American Government;
- ACT or SAT.

Seventeen of these 26 state-prescribed assessments (marked above with an asterisk) serve to comply with federal law.

The state also has developed WebXams, which are used to measure students' acquisition of content knowledge in career-technical education programs. Additionally, the diploma pathway linked to the attainment of an in-demand job credential uses the WorkKeys test.

**Federal:** The federal government also has an interest in the strength and performance of the nation's education system. The economic prosperity of our nation depends on the knowledge and skills of its population, and a quality education is our most important tool. Education also has implications for other national public policy challenges like health care, poverty and crime.

As a condition of the receipt of federal education grant funds, the federal government requires states to have assessments at various grade levels in English language arts, mathematics and science.

In addition to the various purposes described above, there are some overarching considerations shared at multiple levels of testing. One of these is to ensure that a quality education is available to *all* students based on Ohio's Learning Standards. Districts and the state want to be sure that regardless of where students go to school, they have the same opportunities to acquire foundational knowledge and skills needed for future success. Additionally, there are significant equity issues at stake. The subgroup data help to identify achievement gaps, which then can be addressed with additional services and supports thereby helping students more fully grow and succeed.

## Ohio's Testing History

**1990: Ohio Proficiency Tests:** Ohio began standardized testing under legislation enacted by the 118<sup>th</sup> General Assembly nearly three decades ago, long before any federal involvement. The focus at this time was on accountability primarily for districts, which later expanded to schools. The Ninth Grade Proficiency Tests were administered in five subjects – reading, writing, math, science and citizenship. Assessments were later added in grades 4, 6 and 12 in the same content areas. The ninth grade tests also served as a condition for graduation. These first proficiency tests ushered in a new focus on student performance, accountability and transparency for our schools.

**Mid-1990's: Growth in District Assessments:** In response to the multiple grade-level testing structure from the state, districts began to ask, "How well will our students do on the state tests?" As a result, we saw a more significant use of locally determined assessments for monitoring and test preparation begin to emerge. I remember my daughter was in elementary school when my wife and I had a parent-teacher conference that included the results of Columbus Public Schools' first interim assessment program. These types of assessments allowed districts to gauge student knowledge and progress at a particular point in the school year and identify areas where students needed additional support before state testing time. These assessments helped schools target intervention, remediation or after-school tutoring. They also provided information to parents about the level of knowledge acquisition of students.

**2005: Ohio Achievement Tests and Ohio Graduation Tests:** In 2005, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was the first point at which the federal government began to mandate testing. The law had a strong focus on educational quality and equity and set new expectations for states to improve student performance and close achievement gaps. As a result, the General Assembly enacted changes to the state's testing system to accommodate federal requirements. The State Board of Education of Ohio adopted academic learning standards and developed new tests aligned to those standards. The state's Ohio Achievement Assessments (OAAs) and Ohio Graduation Tests (OGTs) were developed and implemented. The state also began using a Kindergarten readiness assessment of literacy (KRA-L).

While the state would be held accountable to the U.S. Department of Education, local school districts and school buildings received report cards, awards for success and increased support for districts needing improvement.

**2012: Teacher Evaluations:** With the implementation of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System in 2012, a significant portion of a teacher's evaluation was based on measures of student growth. For teachers in tested grades and content areas, student growth was determined by state tests that were already being administered. For teachers in un-tested areas, district tests, either from commercial vendors or developed by the district, were used for the purpose of determining student growth.

Some locally created tests were designed to specifically align to identified student learning objectives (SLOs). SLOs are measurable, long-term academic growth targets that a teacher sets at the beginning of the year for all students. The teacher or school creates and administers SLO tests to measure each student's progress on each growth target. Generally, these tests are given at the beginning and end of each year. Approximately 66 percent of teachers were evaluated using SLOs during the 2013-2014 school year.

The use of tests for evaluations represents a fundamental shift in the testing system for two important reasons. First, the need to support evaluation significantly increased the number of tests and testing time. In the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 26 percent of total student test-taking time was spent taking SLO tests. Additionally, the purpose of the assessments shifted from being a tool used by schools and districts to support improving classroom instruction and system performance to also being used to judge teacher performance.

**2015: Ohio State Tests and End-of-Course Exams:** In 2010, Ohio adopted a new set of more rigorous learning standards intended to prepare students for the increasingly challenging requirements of higher education and the workforce. New tests were designed and developed in response to the standards. The grade and content configurations were the same as I articulated earlier.

At first, the new tests were developed and administered under a memorandum with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium. During the 2015 school year, students in grades 3-8 spent up to nine hours per assessment over two testing windows. After a bumpy first year of administering these assessments, the General Assembly passed House Bill 56, limiting state assessments to a single platform and test window. This law required the state to quickly end its relationship with PARCC and find a new vendor for the state assessments. Ohio chose to migrate all of its tests to the same testing vendor, American Institutes for Research (AIR), which had already been involved in developing and administering the state's science and social studies tests. The time students spent taking state tests decreased significantly with this choice. AIR tests take between two and a half to three and a half hours per test, and they are administered in a single window. That said, the net amount of state testing in 2016 was still more than was in place during the years of the OAs and the OGTs.

**Other Notable Tests:** The final piece of the puzzle includes a variety of state tests that serve purposes beyond state accountability. These include the Career-Technical WebXams, which are used to test students on the content of career-technical programs and support federal Perkins grant accountability. The WorkKeys exam is used as part of the diploma pathway that involves an in-demand industry credential. Finally, the ACT/SAT can be used for a diploma pathway, but they also serve to inform students whether they have reached college readiness or the extent to which they have not.

### **How much time do students spend taking tests?**

What started as a teacher giving quizzes and tests has grown into a complex overlay of teacher, district and state tests. This has raised concerns over how much time is spent testing students. It's important to understand several factors when attempting to measure the amount of testing in Ohio.

First, there are many ways that tests are defined. Many school- and district-level tests designed by commercial vendors must be given multiple times throughout the school year, such as monthly or quarterly. There is no common view of whether this is considered one test or multiple tests. Some districts may consider a single administration as a "test" while others define "test" as the multiple administrations given over the course of studying a particular unit or topic.

A seemingly reasonable way to analyze the amount of testing in Ohio would be to look at days spent testing. Districts have provided the Department with many examples of school calendars showing "testing days," but this can be misleading. Most standardized tests have a "testing window," or set number of days during which districts may test students. Generally, a longer testing window is desirable because it provides more flexibility for teachers and schools to schedule tests when they will least disrupt classroom instruction. A testing window may be four weeks long, but that doesn't mean a student is taking a test for four weeks.

It's important to note that there is a lot that we don't know about tests in Ohio. As I have described, there is a lot of discretion when it comes to teachers, schools and districts in terms of tests that they choose to administer. This means that there can be significant variability between classes, buildings and districts in terms of test configurations and the time needed. Two students in different school districts may both take five tests in a year, but the time they spend away from classroom instruction can differ by hours.

In 2015, the state surveyed districts in order to get a better picture of testing time, including district-level testing. The time a student spends in school over the entire K-12 grade span is estimated to be 12,376 hours. Of this amount, 215 hours are spent being tested, which is 1.7 percent. Of this 215 hours, 71 hours (33 percent) is spent on state tests and 144 hours (67 percent) is spent on district tests, including district tests for state requirements and SLOs. This district figure is the best data available based on self-reported data.

Of the 144 hours of district tests, tests related to SLOs total 78.5 hours (54 percent) and other district tests, including those for other state requirements total 66.1 hours (46 percent).

Of the 71 hours of state tests, 53.5 hours (75 percent) serve for Ohio's compliance with federal requirements. The remaining 17.5 hours (25 percent) are not federally required. This is only 8 percent of the total time spent on testing.

Ohio's current state tests take between two and half and three and a half hours per administration. Each year, students in grades 3-8 spend between five and nine hours on state tests. To put this into perspective, students in grades K-12 spend around 1,000 hours per year in school, so the time spent on *state* tests is less than 1 percent.

It is important to understand that when the testing time issue first emerged at the time the PARCC tests were being implemented, the Department was directed by the General Assembly to undertake a study of the issue. The resulting report published in 2015 was a comprehensive analysis of purposes and time requirements. The report also included several recommendations, some of which have been implemented. Recent passage of Senate Bill 3 last December included one of the recommendations — a statutory limit on the amount of time a student spends taking state and district tests to 2 percent of the school year, and a statutory limit on the amount of time spent practicing for tests to 1 percent of the school year. In addition, Ohio eliminated the requirement that districts give math and writing diagnostic tests to students in grades 1-3.

### **What are we hearing from students, teachers and families about testing?**

In the last year, the Department has worked to meaningfully engage diverse groups of stakeholders to solicit a range of thoughts, opinions and recommendations regarding education in Ohio. This work was done partially in response to the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), but we also knew it would be useful beyond the purposes of ESSA. We heard loud and clear the continuing desire to reduce testing. We also heard that academic measures, which are the focus of virtually all assessments, are not the only gauge of a student's readiness or development, nor is it the only gauge of a school's or district's quality. We also heard that the two changes in tests over a two-year period in ELA and mathematics had been disruptive. We recognize that there is an acclimation period to new tests and that each change triggers that acclimation process to begin anew.

In terms of ESSA, a perception emerged that the state's ESSA submission would be the place to change the state's testing structure. Unfortunately, the tests required by the federal government did not change from those required under No Child Left Behind. Further, the federal government has no interest in the state articulating testing that goes beyond federal requirements. Our draft ESSA submission acknowledged this reality, and we are committed to re-examining the states testing structure as a matter of state policy in further consultation with educators, the governor and the General Assembly. This response, however, was not favorably received and was portrayed as ignoring the testing problem.

As you likely know, because of this and other concerns, earlier this week, I announced that I would not submit Ohio's ESSA technical specifications to the federal government on the first deadline of April 3, 2017. Instead we will delay submission until the Sept. 18, 2017, deadline. I stated that I did not want the event of the submission to be a divisive one. By taking this action, it allows us to be diligent in addressing the issues that have surfaced and to work in a collaborative and inclusive way to set the course for excellence, driven by Ohioans for Ohio students.

### **Key takeaways and next steps**

My, and the Department's, commitment to addressing the testing time issue head-on has never been in question. As we synthesized what we heard and what we know about the overall testing structure, we emerged with some key takeaways.

One of these is that the frustrations with testing are not simply due to the non-federally required state tests, but extend to the entire testing structure. As I've noted, non-federally required state tests constitute only 8 percent of the total time spent on testing throughout a child's K-12 career. It is particularly notable that only two grades in the K-8 grade band would see any reduction in testing if the only focus is on non-federally required assessments. Frankly, we do a disservice to ourselves if we only focus on state tests given the significant time spent on non-state tests.

The second key takeaway is that there is a desire for other measures of students' abilities and dispositions, and that the focus only on academics misses key dimensions that contribute to student success.

So what are we going to do? In order to follow through on our commitment to examine testing-related issues, I have established a Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Assessments. The committee will lead the work of conducting a holistic review of testing, including both state required tests and those implemented by districts. The purpose of the committee will be to bring together parents, educators and experts to examine the state's testing structures, both state and local, and develop recommendations to streamline the system. The vision would be an approach to assessments that is smarter, more efficient, provides important feedback and supports the state's accountability system. Options for reducing the number of state tests would be on the table for the committee's consideration, but so would examining ways to reduce the amount of district tests. I expect that the committee also will examine potential tools and strategies that can contribute to further streamlining testing, including assessment audits.

We have had success in several other policy areas with the use of advisory groups. Our standards revision process was successfully guided by an advisory group. The Educator Standards Board has done a good job of recommending changes to the teacher evaluation process (changes that, incidentally, could have an impact on reducing the amount of testing). The Graduation Requirements Workgroup is making good progress toward recommendations to address the current graduation requirements challenge. I am confident that the work of the Advisory Committee on Assessments will have similar positive impacts.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, testing is an important piece of the work we do to create an education system focused on the success of our students. However, no single piece of this work should be overly burdensome for teachers or students. The expansion of testing at the state and district levels has occurred without consideration of the overall amount of testing. Each new policy or initiative is well intentioned and, by itself, may not disrupt instruction time. Yet, taken as a whole, the amount of testing has left students, parents and teachers overwhelmed. While strong accountability and other policy initiatives are important to ensure each student receives a quality education, there should be a continuous check on the amount of time students spend testing. We have heard our stakeholders, and they are clear: testing is an issue. It is taking too much away from the teaching and learning process. We are absolutely committed to doing this work right. Thank you for your time. I will be happy to address any questions you might have.