

Greetings on this fine Friday afternoon! I hope this update finds you doing well and fully rested after Super Bowl Sunday! There are a number of events this weekend – I hope you have an opportunity to get out to support the Hornets! Good luck to the boys’ basketball team as they travel to Riverdale tonight. Tomorrow will see a flurry of activity starting with the HS Solo and Ensemble Music event at Lima Senior, FFA will be traveling to OSU for a competition, while at CR we have a full day of 7th and 8th grade junior high basketball tournament games and the CRYSA 3rd and 4th grade girls’ basketball skills challenge, and culminating with the SOS Camp Willson Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser right before the boys’ basketball tip-off against USV where the CR Hornettes will perform at halftime. Have a great weekend and Go Hornets!

Congratulations!

Kudos to Mason Warnimont for his recent accolades at the indoor track meet! Mason ran a qualifying time of 7.04 at the University of Findlay last Saturday to qualify him for the New Balance National Indoor Meet at the Armory Track and Field Center in New York, New York. Great job Mason!

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

I have received a few communications from parents and community in regards to my last update urging you to make your voice heard at the Ohio Department of Education and with your legislators. I’m glad to see our community actively engaging our representatives to do what’s best for students. As part of those communications, many asked about specific talking points and proposals to resolve some of the issues. To that end, I have composed thoughts from my perspective regarding ESSA (below and bolded by section). I apologize for the length, but I felt it was important to ensure I fully addressed the issue. Feel free to use these when contacting your representatives. I should also add that anytime you can share your own personal perspective and how this has or will impact your child(ren) it is even more effective. ESSA presents an opportunity which doesn’t come along often and, especially, in this particular format where local communities have an opportunity for input. Whatever your perspective is please don’t let this opportunity pass by without making your voice heard. Don’t forget, in addition to contacting you representatives you can visit the Ohio Department of Education webpage to share your thoughts via survey. As always, should you have any questions or want to discuss ESSA further please don’t hesitate to contact me.

ESSA Draft Plan Link: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Every-Student-Succeeds-Act-ESSA>

Testing requirements

On pages 7-8 of Ohio’s ESSA plan, ODE states “What we heard” that “stakeholders expressed an interest in continuing to explore a further reduction in testing”, yet they ignore this desire from stakeholders (as demonstrated on page 8) when they state that “Ohio’s current testing schedule for grade 3-8 and high school goes beyond what is required of ESSA” (extra assessments are listed below). I do not know of many stakeholders who want to continue more testing. Moreover, I am baffled by their claim that testing time has been reduced by 50% since 2014-15. This claim is unsubstantiated and, I believe, not a clear indication of the actual testing that goes on in schools. The solution is simply to follow the federal mandate and stop the extra testing!

Extra tests (not required under ESSA):

- Fall grade 3 ELA assessment
- Grades 4 and 6 Social Studies
- American History and American Government end-of-course exams
- One end-of-course exam in ELA
- One end-of-course exam in mathematics.

ODE also remarks on continuing computer-based tests because “computer adaptive testing does have the ability to measure student performance more deeply and provide schools with data more

quickly". This might be theoretically true but has never been the case. In either form of testing, schools have received the results far too late (and always after the ODE promised deadlines) to make adjustments for the following school year. Additionally, numerous stakeholders, including teachers who work the most closely with kids, would argue that computer adaptive testing at the lower grade levels test *computer skills* and not students' knowledge and ability. In schools with lower socioeconomic demographics, those children face a significant disadvantage because they do not have access to computers outside of school. ODE is effectively handicapping students in lower grades and especially in lower socioeconomic groups and should consider, at the least, allowing paper-pencil testing at the lower grades.

Report Card

We support the inclusion of non-academic measures of school quality on the Report Card as a way to provide a more complete picture of schools. However, the Report Card has many deficiencies which should be addressed.

The Report Card has clearly been demonstrated to be a measure of school district socioeconomics/wealth (see, for one example, http://www.cleveland.com/datacentral/index.ssf/2016/09/see_how_closely_ohio_school_re.html This is not the only analysis but is one of the more readily accessible ones). There are always outliers, but the Report Card is an unfair measure for schools with high percentages of lower socioeconomic groups. However, because ODE is still required to measure schools the solution should be to create a Report Card which demonstrates equity or accounts for inequitable situations.

While ODE may think the Report Card is clear and understandable, all the stakeholders I've spoken with maintain that it is not. What is the solution? I'm not certain. What I can tell you is that the Report Card, while required, only excels at reinforcing inequalities and handicapping schools who are making strides to improve. When good schools, such as ours, are measured against a neighboring school district which has vastly different demographics it hurts school image and community pride because the Report Card does not account for the vast differences between the schools.

While it will not significantly impact us, I should note that I take issue with Ohio's goal of 5% or less chronic absenteeism by 2027. This measures schools for something which is mostly out of their control. Research has clearly demonstrated that specific subgroups (mostly lower socioeconomic) are impacted negatively by chronic absenteeism. Schools already do as much as they can, but they cannot force students to come to school. The court systems for truancy are notoriously slow to respond. Parent support is nonexistent in many of these cases. Implementing this goal is akin to me going to the doctor and saying I'm not feeling well because I'm not sleeping and the doctor replying "well, then, get more sleep" without exploring why I'm not sleeping. Schools are only part of the solution to the issue – but it seems they are getting all the blame. It is patently unfair to measure schools for something they cannot effectively change.

K-3 Literacy

From my perspective, the solution is to simply measure and report what is measured. For instance, our school scored so high (only 1 or 2 students did not meet requirements) that we received an N/A because the state said we didn't have enough who didn't meet the goal to measure it. This should be an "A", but because it wasn't we were effectively harmed because we did so well. We would've been better off from a Report Card perspective to have 3-5 students fail to meet the requirements and receive an "A".

What isn't acceptable as a solution is to state "the Department will explore better alignment...". The ESSA proposal is a significant plan and deserves more than a promise to explore.

Support Excellent Educators

ESSA eliminates the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirement from No Child Left Behind. This is a

great move, especially for small schools with limited resources. While it doesn't always seem like it, HQT can unnecessarily limit a school's ability to put a teacher in a spot where they could be most effective. While HQT can theoretically be a good idea it artificially categorizes teachers without any thought to their skills outside of their education. The federal government (and Ohio) have effectively said that all teachers who are HQT are the best teachers simply because they have a degree that says so. While education is a primary piece of having a qualified teacher it is not the only piece. Schools should be able to make decisions based on local knowledge and evaluation of the teachers. The federal government was wise enough to figure this out – Ohio, on the other hand, has not and will continue with HQT. ESSA was designed to give back some local control but, in this case, ODE has ignored this opportunity.

Additionally, the current educator evaluation system, while theoretically useful is, practically speaking, a one-size-fits-all approach which unnecessarily burdens administrators and teachers. ODE identified broad support for refinement to the system to make it simpler but they did not outline any specific changes. In many instances, ODE or the legislature has been quick to change other things when they were working but when something is identified as needing refinement they, too often, take too long to make changes. The simple solution? Don't require schools to use a one-size fits all approach to evaluating teachers. I can all but guarantee that our school faces different issues and concerns than, for example, Cleveland, Youngstown or Toledo. Let us tailor our approach to our students, our staff, and our community.

Graduation

While not specifically contained in the ESSA draft Graduation requirements are, by association, worth noting. No one wants an Ohio school diploma to be meaningless, as many have claimed it is becoming (such as Ohio School Board member Tom Gunlock). I would posit that what is worse is if 30-40% of Ohio seniors do not graduate. The current graduation requirements are, from our perspective, arbitrary numbers that have been implemented without piloting or thorough research. While our school will not be as drastically impacted as many others, it is a travesty to think that these arbitrary numbers will unnecessarily hinder thousands of students from getting a good job or pursuing an additional trade or higher education. We are not against rigorous requirements and ensuring our students are prepared to succeed at the next level. However, rigorous standards are not rigorous simply because fewer people will attain the goal – rigor, in this case, means that not everyone will easily attain them but that they are realistically attainable. There has been little to no support for schools or students to achieve a successful implementation. ODE has, once again, demonstrated a pattern of implementation followed by a having to pursue a necessary fix. I urge you to push ODE to fully vet policies before implementation – and to stop the current graduation requirements so students statewide do not have their future potential unnecessarily limited.

Speaking on a broader level towards education across the state, I hear about stakeholders – parents and community members – asking schools to teach more life skills to provide a more well-rounded education to students. The current culture is only preparing students to succeed in a vacuum, without the challenges that “life” presents. On paper all the educational theories currently being applied may look good but, in a real-life application, students are entering the world with academic knowledge but lacking social and emotional skills to be truly effective and productive citizens. In a time when those skills are, quite often, even less present at home it is imperative that we recognize that the current direction of education is limiting the potential impact of teachers upon students. ESSA presents an opportunity to get back some of the local control and opportunities to make a difference in students' lives. Please do not let this plan, as currently written, allow the Ohio Department of Education to waste this opportunity by ignoring what is best for our students.