

**DC State Board of Education Public Meeting
Wednesday, March 15, 2017**

**Testimony of Washington Teachers' Union
President Elizabeth Davis**

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 (ESSA) gives states the opportunity to reduce the extreme weight on test scores to rank schools, which was the cornerstone of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

If states choose a robust survey of school climate as their “school quality” indicator, they can shift schools’ attention from raising test scores *per se* to making changes that improve school climate, teaching and student learning.

In addition, such a climate survey would provide invaluable information to parents about the environment and learning conditions in each school to help them choose the best school for their children.

D.C. educators and parents are excited about the opportunities ESSA offers our school district to select school climate measures to enhance school accountability, school improvement and parent choice.

However, OSSE’s school accountability proposal to give standardized test scores 80% of an elementary school’s overall rating, with the remaining 20% primarily on attendance and re-enrollment rates, gives 0% weight to comprehensive school climate measures that are known to help schools improve.

By so doing, OSSE's draft gives 0 % weight to comprehensive school climate measures that are known to help schools improve – what is going on inside the school, e.g., teacher expectations of students' ability, the challenge of the curriculum, and adult supportiveness of students – that could be used to help schools improve and strengthen the basis for parental choice.

Under the current OSSE accountability proposal, there is no credit for growth in our schools in this proposal. This is a serious problem.

This would perpetuate NCLB's huge and failed emphasis on testing and disregard ESSA's encouragement for states to broaden accountability to focus on improving school quality.

Parents and teachers have urged OSSE and the State Board of Education to reduce the weight of test scores to the lowest percent legally allowed—around 55% for elementary grades and less for high schools.

OSSE's draft accountability plan for elementary and middle schools frustrates ESSA's objectives. It proposes to weight standardized test scores 80% of the school's overall rating, with the remaining 20% primarily on attendance and re-enrollment rates.

The weight for test scores needs to be reduced from 80% of the total rating to the lowest level permissible by ESSA, about 50% of the total, a difference of 30% of the total rating. At least that 30% of total weight needs to be given instead to one or more school climate indicators.

Giving equal weight in rating to “proficiency” and “growth” unfairly favors school in high-income areas, where the vast majority of students have family and economic advantages and are “proficient.” Moreover, it unfairly penalizes schools in low-income areas, where the vast majority of students are often disadvantaged and below “proficiency.”

OSSE’s proposal needs to be revised to give much more weight in the test score indicators to “growth” than to “proficiency.” For example, giving 40% of total weight to “growth” and 10% to “proficiency.”

Parents and teachers have urged OSSE (and the D.C. State Board of Education) to greatly reduce the 80% weight for test scores, to give substantial weight to school climate measures, and, within test score indicators, to give much more weight to “growth” than to “proficiency.”

Parents and the 4,800 members of our bargaining unit, those working closest to children, understand that reducing measurements for school quality has had a negative impact on learning environments; has grossly failed to close the achievement (opportunity) gap; and has contributed to growing educational disparities in our school district.

What we hold schools accountable to is what gets prioritized in our students day-to-day life. If 80% of a school’s accountability measure is based on test scores, then that is what the vast majority of the time will be spent on.

When we measure academic performance solely on proficiency, we are negating the important work that schools are doing with students who enter significantly below grade level.

ESSA implementation and consequences have effects on our students overall educational experience. When high-stakes accountability measures are tied to student performance without adequate school supports, schools that serve our highest need students will have trouble maintaining staff and resources.

ESSA regulations allow OSSE to submit an accountability plan by either April 3rd or September 18, 2017, yet OSSE is trying to submit the plan by April 3rd. This rushed schedule undermines the ability of education stakeholders to collaborate on developing robust school accountability measures that can help schools improve and would severely restrict the new school Chancellor's capacity to close the achievement gap.

Instead, OSSE should defer submitting a state plan and ask key DCPS and charter school stakeholder organizations to select representatives for a special, top priority OSSE stakeholder advisory task force on ESSA accountability.

By August 2017, the task force would recommend one or more school climate surveys for OSSE to administer as a "pilot" in fall 2017 and, after any revision, administer for "accountability" in spring 2018.

That way, OSSE would be able to publicly report the results for ratings before the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, as required by DOE. The task force would also advise what would be the best weights to give to school climate measures and the other indicators in OSSE's January 30th draft state plan.

In summary, OSSE should: heavily reduce the weight of test scores in school ratings; replace the reduced weight with weight

for robust school climate measures; within test scores, shift much more weight to “growth” than “proficiency;” defer submitting any accountability proposal to DOE until September 18th; and create an advisory task force – representing all key DCPS and charter school stakeholders – to collaborate with OSSE on revising its accountability plan, including recommending one or more specific school climate surveys, and complete its recommendations to OSSE by August 2017.

If we fail to take advantage of every opportunity ESSA offers us to fix our schools, then we have failed our children

Thank you and members of the State Board of Education for your consideration to this request and your continued support of our schools.