

State Board of Education
March 15, 2017
Public Hearing
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
School Accountability Measures
Testimony of Suzanne Wells
Capitol Hill Public Schools Parent Organization
Parent of a 6th grader at Eliot-Hine Middle School

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening on the Office of the State Superintendent's (OSSE) School Accountability Measures/State Plan that has been developed to comply with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA or the Act). The Act provides us a welcomed opportunity to make meaningful changes in how schools are held accountable. As has been said before, "*What gets measured gets done,*" so how schools are measured has profound impacts on what students are taught in the classroom, on how teachers spend their time, and on how schools serving our most vulnerable students are evaluated.

There has been considerable public interest in the School Accountability Measures precisely because they are so important. I commend the State Board of Education (SBOE) for informing our community over eight months ago about the School Accountability requirements under ESSA, and seeking our input on what we believe should be measured. I commend the SBOE for developing a set of recommendations on OSSE's draft plan. I commend parents in my community for taking the time to become knowledgeable about the School Accountability Measures plan, and for thoughtfully developing comments on the draft plan.

A little more than 24 hours ago, OSSE released its summary of the comments it received throughout the public comment period, and the decisions it made in the updated state plan based on that feedback. I am sorry to say that OSSE did not begin to meaningfully address the substantive comments it received from the public or the SBOE. OSSE's tweaked its initial proposal in minor ways, for example, it lowered the weight afforded to testing from 80% to 70%. At first glance that might seem like a lot until you understand that virtually every public commenter asked that the weight afforded to testing be dropped to the lowest allowable by law which is 51%.

OSSE continues to want to use attendance as a proxy measure of school satisfaction, and their final plan increases by over 1% the weight going towards attendance measures. While attendance is undoubtedly important, it's truly hard to understand why attendance, which is compulsory for students between the ages of 5 – 18, and for which just seven unexcused absences can result in you getting a letter from the Metropolitan Police Department, can be viewed as a meaningful measure of school satisfaction. The public repeatedly commented that school climate surveys would be better measures of school satisfaction AND would provide actionable data upon which schools could make meaningful improvements. OSSE is afraid to use school climate surveys which they believe are not adequately tested, but they are fearless about using the PARCC test which is an imperfect measure of academic success at best.

The public asked that measures on a well-rounded education be considered. In response, OSSE put a vague, yet to be determined, measure of “Access and Opportunities” that they want to test two years down the road under school environment and gave it a 5% weight. Worse still that 5% might also have to cover whatever is decided regarding school climate surveys.

So what does the OSSE state plan look like now for an elementary school? We’ve got 70% being dedicated to a test given once a year that is an imperfect measure of academic success, 12.5% going to measure compulsory attendance rates, 7.5% to re-enrollment, 5% to a yet to be determined well-rounded education and school climate assessment, and 5% to an ESSA required English language learner proficiency. I’d be hard pressed to say that sounds like a solid path forward to making educational progress for our students.

So what to do now? I suggest that the SBOE’s work on the state plan is not done. I urge the State Board of Education to vote NO on the OSSE State Plan. The SBOE and OSSE have the chance to make important changes to how our schools are evaluated for the next ten years. You have the opportunity to say we don’t want our teachers to teach to the test, that we want our students to have a well-rounded education, and that we want our students to be in school environments conducive to learning. Don’t stop before you get to the finish line. Vote NO on the OSSE State Plan, and do the hard work it will take to get this plan right.