

## Stark educators to state: Don't waste opportunity

### Monday

Posted Mar 13, 2017 at 3:35 PM

Updated Mar 13, 2017 at 8:13 PM

Canton City Schools Superintendent Adrian E. Allison and the Stark Education Partnership have joined the chorus of educators statewide who say state education leaders are wasting the best opportunity Ohio has seen in at least a decade to improve its educational system.

By Kelli Weir Repository staff writer

Some Stark County educators say state leaders are on the verge of wasting the best opportunity Ohio has seen in at least a decade to improve its educational system.

**Canton City Schools** Superintendent Adrian E. Allison and the **Stark Education Partnership** have joined the chorus of educators statewide asking the state leaders to delay the submission of Ohio's plan that outlines how state learning standards, testing, report cards and support for struggling schools and students comply with the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act. Federal guidelines for ESSA, which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act in December 2015, require states to submit an accountability plan in April or September.

Allison, who testified earlier this month before the influential Joint Education Oversight Committee, said the Ohio Department of Education's **draft ESSA plan** ignores the flexibility the new federal law gives states in how they test students and how they communicate school performance to the public.

"They rely on the same ole, same ole things they did in the past," said Allison, a former attorney for the state education department and current co-chair of the **Ohio 8 Coalition** that represents Ohio's eight urban school districts. "(Ohio's) accountability system is broken, yet ODE's plan still relies on this same accountability system to determine how it's going to do business."

Stark Education Partnership President Teresa Purses, who on Friday submitted the nonprofit group's **research paper** to state leaders, said without changes to how Ohio tests its students and holds its schools accountable, the state's mode of instructing students will not change substantially because districts feel pressured to teach the material students will be tested on – even if that material doesn't include the skills students will need to succeed in the workplace of the future.

"Businesses want students who can work in a team, who are critical thinkers and can think creatively," said Purses, former Canton Local superintendent who also served as the director of the Ohio Department of Education's State Support Team for Region 9. "It's not about memorizing, it's about constructing knowledge. That's the new economy and we need to prepare students in that way as opposed to preparing students to take a test that, in a way, doesn't matter because it doesn't move them forward."

On Monday, State Superintendent Paolo DeMaria said the education department will wait until September to submit its ESSA plan to the U.S. Department of Education.

"In recent weeks, we've heard from stakeholders who feel their input was not reflected in the ESSA template," wrote DeMaria in a message posted on the Ohio Department of Education's website. "In reality, however, stakeholder sentiments were heard loud and clear, and we have stated our commitment to identifying solutions to the challenges raised. Much of this work can be done outside the narrow focus of the ESSA specifications."

DeMaria said the additional five months will give the department more time to review the feedback it received on its draft plan, as well as begin its strategic planning process that will address education issues beyond the scope of the federal law. DeMaria previously has said that Ohio's ESSA submission is not meant to be a comprehensive strategic plan but to fulfill the state's obligation to prove compliance with federal requirements.

He noted that multiple committees and workgroups have been created to evaluate issues such as student graduation requirements and teacher evaluations. On Monday, DeMaria announced that he would convene an advisory committee to analyze all state-required tests as well as district-level tests.

### **Areas of concern**

Here's a look at two issues that local educators hope the state will reconsider:

#### **Testing**

**What ESSA requires:** States must give students at least 17 standardized tests over the course of a student's K-12 career to gauge student academic performance. States can substitute college entrance exams, such as the ACT or SAT, for end-of-course assessments and can consider using competency-based assessments and computer-based tests that adapt to a student's ability level.

**What Ohio's plan proposes:** Students would continue to take 24 statewide tests. Ohio's seven tests not required by ESSA are the fall administration of the grade 3 English language arts assessment; grades 4 and 6 social studies assessments; American history and American government end-of-course assessments; an end-of-course assessment in English language arts and an end-of-course assessment in math. Under new graduation requirements, students in the Class of 2018 and beyond must score well on the end-of-course exams to earn enough points for a diploma. They no longer will take the Ohio Graduation Test.

Education leaders said in the draft plan that Ohio will not use the ACT or the SAT as substitute exams because many educators, parents and community members urged the department to stop changing its tests. Ohio has changed the

majority of its tests two times over the last three years. State officials also pledged to study the costs and benefits of computer-adaptive testing and how to offer more competency-based assessments for science, according to the plan.

Under the state superintendent's advisory committee on assessments that was announced Monday, committee members will evaluate the state-required and district-level tests. Additional details about the committee are expected to be released in the new few weeks. Eliminating some of the tests would require a state law change.

### **Suggestions:**

**1. Reduce the number of tests given.** While the state has reduced the amount of time students spend taking tests, Stark County educators say it should eliminate the seven tests not required under ESSA to give schools more time for classroom instruction. The Stark Education Partnership believes the state could further eliminate tests by instead using the scores from the assessments students already are taking, such as the ACT, SAT and WorkKeys Industry Credentials exam, and by authorizing local school boards the option of using classroom grades to award students credit toward graduation. The partnership's research shows that nearly half of the 26 states that required students to pass a test in order to graduate have eliminated the requirement.

**2. Revamp the tests.** Local educators say receiving state test scores months after students leave for summer break doesn't help teachers and administrators those struggling. Allison believes the state assessments should be structured to help teachers and administrators pinpoint students' weak areas and give them time to reinforce their lessons where needed. Allison and Purses also want state leaders to consider giving districts the option of using alternative methods of measuring student learning, such as classroom observations, projects or portfolio work, that would be a better indicator for students who may perform poorly on a math test, but could show how they apply math concepts while welding or fixing a car.

### **School report cards**

**What ESSA requires:** States must provide an account of each school's performance by providing information on several measurements, including student academic achievements, graduation rate, English language proficiency

and school quality. The report cards also must provide a single rating with at least three performance levels for every district and school. States also must set long-term goals for all students and certain student subgroups.

**What Ohio's plan proposes:** Ohio will keep the report card system it has used since 2012 that gives schools and districts an A to F letter grade on six measurements: Achievement, progress, graduation, K-3 literacy, gap closing and prepared for success. Schools also will receive an overall letter grade for the first time.

State leaders propose to use chronic absenteeism rates and student discipline incidents to satisfy ESSA's new school quality indicator. The chronic absenteeism rate measures the percentage of students who miss at least 10 percent, or about 18 days, of school, within a school year. Schools can earn a good grade by having a low chronic absenteeism rate or by showing rate improvement.

They also pledge to survey parents and focus groups for ways to make the report cards more user-friendly and understandable and will provide a better explanation for the oft-confused measures.

The plan proposes the following 10-year goals: 80 percent of all students will score proficient in math, English language arts and science, at least 93 percent of students will graduate within four years after entering ninth grade and no more than 5 percent of students will be chronically absent.

### **Suggestions:**

**1. Change the report card's measurement for student growth.** The state's **value-added** measurement was designed to gauge whether a student got a full year's worth of education, but Stark educators say the measurement's **complicated calculation** leaves districts and schools guessing on how to earn an A, as well as wondering why they earned an A on the measure one year, then an F the following year even though they used the same or better instructional strategies. Allison believes the calculation also needs to be adjusted to account for student demographics, such as poverty and mobility that are known to impact a student's ability to learn.

**2. Eliminate the letter grades.** Stark County educators said many of the A to F letter grades are confusing and sometimes misleading to parents and the community. As an example, they point to the grading scale for the student growth measurement that awards a C grade, which many may associate with average effort, to the districts and schools that meet the state's expectations. They say the labels also penalize districts with a concentration of children living in poverty because multiple studies have shown that lower report card scores correlate with the districts of low wealth.

**3. Reconsider using the chronic absenteeism rate as a measure of school quality.** The Stark Education Partnership asks in its white paper, "How does a school control for a kid who is constantly absent because he, or she, stays home to take care of siblings because (their) parents are drugged out or missing?" It suggests that Ohio explore using school climate and student engagement surveys instead.

*Reach Kelli at 330-580-8339 or [kelli.weir@cantonrep.com](mailto:kelli.weir@cantonrep.com).*

***On Twitter: @kweirREP***  
.....

false