



March 29, 2018

Chair Pratt and Members of the Senate E-12 Policy Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the 8,300 members of Minnesota PTA (Parent Teacher Association).

Minnesota PTA was founded in 1922 by a group of mothers concerned about the education, health and welfare of not only their children, but all children in Minnesota. With this mission, this organization has spent the last 96 years advocating for children and their families. We work tirelessly to be sure parent voices are heard when decisions are being made that affect their children's education, health or well-being.

Minnesota PTA is opposed to the proposed academic achievement rating system included in the delete all amendment to SF 3086. We ask that you instead support the work of the Minnesota Department of Education Data Dashboard Subcommittee as it develops a new format for the online state report card and data reporting system. The subcommittee process involves a wide range of diverse voices, and is very responsive to the input from parents and families regarding their needs for clear and understandable data and information about their children's schools.

Minnesota PTA has been a part of the ESSA State Plan and accountability system development since 2016. We participated in all the accountability sub-committee meetings, along with a large group of people who shared multiple perspectives on how to achieve the best outcomes for our students. When this group talked about the structure of the accountability system, we also talked about the data available and the data that would be generated. The conversation always included considerations about how to best structure the system and the data so that it was useful and understandable for parents and families, teachers and staff and the broader community. We also brought the parent voice to ESSA focus groups, public hearings and public comments regarding the law and its implementation.

In December of 2017, Minnesota PTA continued our participation on the Data Dashboard Subcommittee. The group has reviewed and given extensive feedback to MDE on the current report card, and reviewed multiple report cards from other states to identify components and approaches that would or would not meet Minnesota's needs. We evaluated mockups of new data dashboards that present the accountability data required in ESSA.



SF 3086 Testimony, continued

One clear message that has come out of our conversations is that the sub-committee did not want a report card that presented “summative letter grades with judgement”. This subcommittee is deep into discussions of how data can be best presented for the clearest understanding by parents and community members.

The proposed academic achievement rating system is based on much fewer data points than what is possible in a new data dashboard. It limits the possibilities for parent understanding and actionable information. A simple star rating system based on one-day test results, attendance and graduation rates does not give a clear, nor accurate, assessment of a school. It also does not welcome, nor encourage, parent engagement.

We know that parents engaged in their child’s education have students that attend school more regularly, earn better grades, enroll in advanced-learning opportunities and have higher graduation rates. By skimming the surface of outcome data for individual schools the ability of a parent to truly be engaged in the educational process is lost.

Minnesota PTA was fortunate enough to receive a grant from National PTA’s Center for Family Engagement last month. The purpose of the grant is to find examples of transformative family engagement happening across our state and learn how to scale the practices state-wide. We are thrilled with this opportunity and know we will learn a lot as we gather data and stories these next few months from parents and schools across the state.

What we won’t find in our conversations with engaged parents, however, are inspiring stories regarding MCA test days, nor passionate debates about attendance policies. What we will find are stories of parents truly connected with their school, passionate about their child’s education, working to get their schools the resources they need, and willing to find creative ways to inspire all students to be their best. And when we find those stories, we will likely see corresponding improved test scores, or attendance rates, or graduation rates. While the goal is increased parent engagement, the result is a higher performing school.

We encourage this committee to allow the MDE Data Dashboard sub-committee to complete their work and to allow a system to be developed that evaluates many different data points that encourage all parents to truly be engaged in their child’s education.

Thank you for your consideration.

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