

Remarks on Essa Resolution,  
Ruth Wattenberg

First, I have loved the outpouring of public comment and debate that we've had on this issue. Hundreds of people have attended meetings in every ward. Hundreds have filed comments and completed surveys.

One night last November, we stayed here until 9:30 pm to hear testimony. Last Wednesday, having had only 24 hours to see the final plan, more than 30 people from every ward, braved the cold and snow to testify. And parents, charter leaders, education advocates, Ward education network leaders – all have filed letters with their views. The Post and bloggers have weighed in. Some of put us forth our views in WP oped. And there have been numerous tweets!

And today, we received a letter signed by the leaders of the 7 of 8 ward education networks with the most students, asking us to reject this proposal as it now stands.

This outpouring and engagement has been a great success of our board process, and should hearten us all. Worthwhile policies are not weakened by strong debate. Unanimity doesn't improve policy. It may say that there's no more to discuss..

I appreciate the time and thought that my colleagues' invested in the work of our Board ESSA committee. Together, we produced 10 thoughtful, hard-fought consensus recommendations. The process pushed all of us to think more about what matters most and to hear each other.

I wish that process could be replicated across the many people that testified before us and commented, so overwhelmingly in opposition to the plan, **and** those who have signed letters and met with OSSE in favor of the plan. We need a conversation across these groups, not confined within each group.

Thanks to the debate and the engagement, and to changes made by OSSE, the policy proposed here has become better. For K-8 schools, the proposal credits how much students have learned **slightly** more than it credits their absolute test scores (which mostly reflect what they knew when they entered the school year, not what they learned while in it). It's not the attention to growth that I would prefer, but it is a genuine shift and a compromise that I appreciate.

There are other smaller changes, including a pilot on climate surveys and a commitment to add 5 points in year 3 to something called "access and opportunities. These are important, and I don't dismiss them. I hope they will lead to good changes.

But for now one is a research pilot and the other is for a very small number of points. In contrast, our State Board recommendations, urged that new indicators of climate and well-rounded education ultimately count for at least 10% each.

These changes are not enough.

***An accountability system should steer schools towards good practices and should measure whether a school provides a quality education and grows student achievement.*** The federal law gives us the flexibility to create such a system. This proposal doesn't go far enough.

Test scores are a very important part of rating a school. But the entire school rating should not be based only – or even 95% -- on just test scores, attendance and reenrollment (or for high schools, graduation rates).

As for promoting a well-rounded education, this proposal has no science. No social studies. No arts, physical education, citizenship, foreign language.

As for School climate—a school environment that is welcoming, challenging, stimulating, and safe—it is unmeasured except by the rough proxies of attendance and re-enrollment.

This is **way** too narrow.

As for growth, the final round of revisions gives growth a slight priority over proficiency in the k-8 ratings. But, there is no growth measured in the high school rating at all. While there is a promise to explore it and report back to us in spring 2019, the timeline and process don't suggest adequate urgency or a role for the public in making important choices about high school tests.

Finally this process -- revisions last Tuesday, final public testimony last Wednesday, a final proposal last Friday, and a vote today, with new comments from major institutions flying in just hours ago, along with new clarifications of the latest changes—has been too rushed for an issue that matters so much.

And we as a board, despite many requests, have never seen, except for two examples, models of how this rating system works in actual schools. We just don't know, given the weight of proficiency and other measures whether improving schools will be recognized or not. And, last week the weights changed. We certainly don't what effect that will have.

I can accept, though very reluctantly, that the measuring sticks we want don't exist in the form OSSE wants and that we can't put these better measurements into place today. What I can't accept is that we don't commit to clear goals with roughh weights for including climate, well rounded education, and high school growth; timelines that suggest a

sense of urgency; a public engagement process that will promote and enable a real cross sector, multi-stakeholder discussion that negotiates these issues, and a process that assures the state board a continued ability to provide input on and approve new components and weights.