

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Tom Gunlock and I feel privileged to be here today to testify in support HB 512.

I am here today to share with you my personal thoughts regarding HB 512 as a result of the six years I spent as a member, and former president, of the State Board of Education. My thoughts on the bill are also shaped in part by my experience as a businessman. I currently serve as the Director of Construction and Property Management at RG Properties in Dayton, Ohio. And while I currently serve as an appointed member to the Miami University Board of Trustees, I am not here today in that capacity nor does my testimony represent the collective feedback of the Miami University Board of Trustees.

Ohio's existing education governance structure is broken. We currently have too many cooks in the kitchen so to speak developing education policy in this state. We have the governor, the General Assembly and the State Board of Education.

Let's discuss the State Board of Education. In November of 1953 the voters passed an amendment to the state constitution to create a State Board of Education. The amendment, although somewhat contentious, was simple: "There shall be a state board of education which shall be elected in such manner and for such terms as shall be provided by law. There shall be a superintendent for public instruction, who shall be appointed by the state board of education. The respective powers and duties of the board and the superintendent shall be prescribed by law." In addition, the General Assembly spelled out the duties of the board in Section 3301.07 of the Revised Code: The State Board of Education "shall exercise under the acts of the General Assembly general supervision of the system of Public Education in the state. The board shall exercise policy forming, planning and evaluation functions of the public schools."

The state superintendent and the State Board of Education have no direct link to either the legislature or the governor. And despite the best efforts of some individual board members, the State Board of Education does not get to tell the General Assembly what to do. At the same time employees of the Department of Education, who work for the state superintendent, are charged with implementing and regulating education policy initiatives developed by the General Assembly and signed into law by the governor.

It is ridiculous to think that the staff at the Department of Education and local school districts, administrators and educators can be successful with this many "bosses" in Columbus, not to mention the competing priorities and political agendas. I feel strongly the current governance structure is not working for Ohio's students. The current system creates conflict and chaos in budget-setting, policy-making and program administration and oversight. This flawed way of doing business would never work for any successful business enterprise.

I have long had concerns about the governance of primary and secondary education in this state. As a member of the State Board I saw firsthand the frequent clash of education policy. The legislature, governor, state board and the Department are rarely on the same page causing confusion and a see-saw effect as policy is pulled in one direction and then another leaving students and parents in the middle of a mess.

As an example, the General Assembly directed the State Board to change high school graduation requirements. After much thought and debate the State Board recommended seven end of course exams: English 9, 10, Algebra I, Geometry, American History, American Government, Biology.

During conference committee members the General Assembly determined that physical science would be the science exam for high school students. I am sure a few members of the conference committee were a little embarrassed to find out that physical science was only offered in about 50% of the districts. As a result of the confusion Ohio's class of 2018 were initially told to take an end of course exam for a class many of them would never take. In a later legislative session the General Assembly made the correction.

We all remember and many are still debating Ohio's new learning standards.

Although it is nearly 5 years since the State Board first set the number of points on the end of course exams required to earn a diploma we are still debating and calling for ridiculously minimal graduation requirements even though the percentage of students meeting required scores on end of course exams is roughly the same as it was when students needed to pass the Ohio Graduation Test. The State Board, in their haste to lower standards, has concluded that Ohio's students are not capable of learning the basics in 7 freshman/sophomore level classes. Instead the Board is once again recommending that students can graduate by doing little more than showing up to school your senior year 93 percent of the time.

No doubt you will hear testimony from individuals that feel that a larger, consolidated agency will be more bureaucratic and interfere with local control. Based on my experience I would say nothing could be farther from the truth. Effective local control works best in an environment where roles, responsibilities and expectations are clear and consistent, something not available under the current governance structure. The second guessing and whiplash-like changes we see now are confusing to districts adding uncertainty to what exactly is expected of Ohio school districts and students.

As for bureaucracy, has anyone tried to get an answer to a question or request data from the Department of Education? The taxpayers of the State of Ohio paid for every junior in the Spring of 2017 to take either the ACT/SAT. To date has any member of the General Assembly or have the taxpayers of this state been informed of the results of that test? The individual students have been but we the public have not. What about the length of time it takes to develop administrative rules working their way through the agency and state board? Don't kid yourself, we already have an unresponsive bureaucracy that shows little interest in efficiency. And because the Department answers to a 19-member board instead of the governor who exactly is responsible to make the system work?

Ohio's education system should support quality educational opportunities for all students and value for taxpayer but most people you talk with agree the system we have now doesn't deliver that. The fractured governance structure we have gets in the way. It makes sense to me that we look at how we can make the governance of our K-12 education system more transparent and efficient. That's a conversation worth having.

In 1953 the voters of Ohio understood that the world had changed. Ohio's education system and how it operated needed to change to better address challenges of the post World War II era.

But it's no longer 1953 or even the 20th Century. The challenges we face today are not the same as those faced sixty years ago. Our education system, including the governance structure, must recognize and adapt to reality.

I believe we can do better. I believe that HB 512 gives us an opportunity to do better. The arc from grade school to middle school to high school to career or to higher education has become a single, unbroken span demanding a unified approach and consistent vision of our education system.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.