

Testimony on House Bill 512

House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee

Thank you, Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 512.

My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy and Advocacy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The Fordham Institute is an education-focused nonprofit that conducts research, analysis, and policy advocacy with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C. Our Dayton office, through the affiliated Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, is also a charter school sponsor.

I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 512. This legislation would represent a major restructuring of education governance in Ohio and would move the state toward a more coordinated, coherent approach to K-12, postsecondary, and workforce-development policy.

Our support is centered on two key aspects of this legislation. First, HB 512 allows Ohio governors to take on a stronger leadership role in agenda setting, policy design, and the implementation of initiatives aimed at improving readiness for college or career. Second, it creates a unified state agency responsible for carrying out the bulk of K-12 education policies, along with higher education and workforce policy.

We've all heard the data on K-12 education. On Ohio's state tests only half of eighth grade students are proficient in English and only 55 percent are on grade level in math. Using the higher NAEP standards, Ohio proficiency numbers dip to the mid-30's in both subjects. Low-income students and students of color post even lower scores. It's clear that we can and must find ways to improve student achievement in K-12 education.

This bill though isn't concerned solely with K-12. Its more unified approach is critical as data continue to show that too many young people struggle to make transitions from high school to college or career. Consider the following statistics:

- **College remediation:** It's no secret that too many college-going freshmen require remediation before taking credit-bearing courses. According to the most recent data from the Ohio Department of Higher Education, 31 percent of students attending a public college or university require remediation in either English or math. Disappointingly, but not surprisingly, research indicates that students needing remediation when entering college are far less likely to earn a degree.
- **College completion:** While roughly three in five Ohio high school graduates enroll in a college or university, only about 30 percent actually go on to earn two- or four-year degrees. Various reasons—from academic unpreparedness to financial challenges—could explain the disparity between matriculation and completion rates. But regardless of the reason, Ohio needs to take steps to narrow the college enrollment-completion gap.
- **Work-ready credentials:** Research from Georgetown University finds that Ohio has thousands of "good jobs" available—careers that pay respectable wages but don't require four-year degrees.

Yet data indicate that only 4 percent of the high school graduating classes of 2015 and 2016 left with industry-recognized credentials—certifications that can open doors to meaningful employment.

The changes proposed in HB 512 would better align Ohio's K–12, higher education, and workforce development systems so that they no longer operate in separate spheres. Though many states still maintain formal separation between K–12 and postsecondary systems, New York, Florida, and a handful of smaller states take a more unified K–16 approach. Structures such as these can promote consistent expectations, align policy development and information systems, and create a culture of shared responsibility for the well-being of young people from elementary school to their first jobs.

In addition to improved alignment, HB 512 would also create conditions that allow education and workforce initiatives to be vigorously implemented. This would be achieved primarily by granting the governor greater leadership responsibility and accountability for education outcomes. In the realm of K–12, Ohio has a fragmented system in which both the governor and state board of education try to exert influence over policy implementation. On rare occasions, they work in harmony. But other times, they work at cross-purposes, leading to less coherent policies or weakened implementation.

An example is the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, an early-literacy initiative championed by Governor Kasich. Initially, he had wanted strict reading standards before schools could promote third graders, but these have been diluted by rulemaking and implementation processes. Today, a seemingly impressive 94 percent of third graders are allowed to move to the next grade, despite the fact that just 63 percent of students are deemed proficient on Ohio's fourth grade reading exams.

We'll never know whether anything would have been different had Governor Kasich held more direct authority. But by allowing future governors to directly oversee a unified state education and workforce agency, HB 512 would significantly improve the likelihood that initiatives are faithfully carried out. This is surely why governors of both parties, including Governors Voinovich, Strickland, and Kasich, have sought more formal authority in primary-secondary education. It is also likely the reason that the large majority of states grant governors appointments over state education boards and/or education agency directors. This is not to say that governors should always get what they want: Checks and balances are essential to any governing model. But the check on the governor should come primarily via the legislature and, of course, through the will of the people who ultimately hold him or her accountable at the ballot box.

The time is right to make these changes. Due to term limits, Governor Kasich will leave office in January, and the fall election promises to be hotly contested. While restructuring alone is unlikely to deliver the results Ohio needs to secure its future prosperity, the changes proposed in HB 512 would create conditions that promise more seamless transitions for students. To remain internationally competitive as a state, we can't afford to lose talent and human potential simply because of incoherent and misaligned policy making. Instead, our next governor—whoever he or she may be—should have the ability to create, implement, and lead initiatives aimed at preparing more young people for college and the workforce.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.