



The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

House Bill 512: Opposition Testimony
House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
Wednesday, March 7, 2018

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde and Members of the Committee:

My name is Scott DiMauro, Vice President of the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of OEA's 125,000 members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 512. OEA is opposed to this legislation as introduced.

Let me say at the outset that we share the stated goals of the bill's sponsor and its proponents to have greater collaboration among education at all levels. Pre-K through 12, higher education and workforce development should work together in partnership to help our students succeed. Existing partnerships around the state must be strengthened, learned from and serve as models to be replicated. The members and leaders of OEA stand ready to assist in this work. But we do not believe that the proposed merger of the Ohio Department of Education, Ohio Department of Higher Education and the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation into a single agency while greatly diminishing the role of the State Board of Education (SBOE) is the best way to achieve these goals.

OEA believes the proposed consolidation of these state departments would dilute the unique roles and needs of each department. The education of students in pre-K through grade 12 is a large and complicated enterprise. HB 512 would relegate ODE's functions to a portion of a new "super" agency, overseen by a Deputy Director.

OEA is skeptical that adopting the structure proposed in HB 512 will promote additional collaboration. Indeed, collaboration is notoriously hard to legislate. A single mission espoused by the Department must be translated, adopted and adapted to over 600 school districts each governed by locally elected boards of education. Each student has different needs, desires, strengths and challenges. The spirit of collaboration has to be demonstrated by bringing stakeholders such as parents, educators at all levels, business leaders, community leaders and policymakers to the table.

Further, OEA is concerned about the diminished role of the State Board of Education. Members of the Board serve an important democratic function that allows for input from the public, parents and educators on K-12 education issues. Elected State Board members represent all corners of our state and bring their unique perspectives. These may not necessarily be the same perspectives that will be sought out by future Governors. However, the hybrid makeup of the Board as an elected and appointed body gives the Governor tremendous input with appointments to the Board. This is collaborative by its very nature.



HB 512 retains the State Board in its current composition with the ability to appoint the Superintendent of Public Instruction. However, most of its duties would be transferred to the Department of Learning and Achievement. The Board and Superintendent would primarily oversee educator licensure and misconduct. The argument that this makes SBOE consistent with other boards and commissions rings hollow. SBOE's authority is unique in that it is called for in the Ohio Constitution. This proposed change in the powers and duties of the State Board may follow the letter of the law, but not its spirit.

All of this being said, we all must recognize that the structure of departments and who works on what floor of a building in Columbus ultimately do not decide the success of our students. The policies that are adopted, the funding and resources provided, the ways we empower teachers to inspire learners will do quite a bit more. OEA is committed to advocating for the needs of students, the rights of our members, and great public schools for every child. As the debate continues on this bill and other vital issues before the legislature we seek to continue to collaborate with interested parties to meet our shared goals.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your consideration of these concerns. Again, OEA urges opposition to the bill in its current form. I would be happy to entertain questions from the Committee.