

Ohio House of Representatives
House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
Tom Thistleton's Opponent Testimony on HB 512
March 7, 2018

Dear Members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB 512, relating to the creation of the Department of Learning and Achievement. My name is Tom Thistleton. I founded Mars Hill Academy (MHA), a K-12 private classical and Christian school, in Cincinnati, OH in 1996.

Our school is a prime example of the power of local control (primarily parents), local decision-making, and local involvement in the education of children. Political motivations and actions are virtually nonexistent at MHA. The academic results have been impressive, with over 1/3 of our graduates being Nationally Merit Commended, Semi-Finalists, or Finalists. This can be attributed to many factors but one of the largest is the local nature and control of the school.

Basic problem-solving logic tells us that a problem is best addressed closest to its origin. The further away from the problem the solution is derived, the less likelihood it has of success. This is a fundamental, almost scientific, truth of problem solving. HB 512 violates this basic principle by increasing central control over education even more so than it is today. In addition, it further weakens the people's representation in education decisions by moving decision-making to a politically appointed body.

If the Department of Education is not fulfilling its responsibilities today, then work to reform the Department, don't create a new Department. It's highly likely that the best solution would be to move in the exact opposite direction of HB 512, de-centralizing control and decision-making further. Again, this would be consistent with the basic problem-solving logic cited above. If not, I'm afraid this new Department will produce many things but learning and achievement will not be among them.

Thank you, committee members, for your time, your kind consideration of my comments, and for allowing me to share my concerns about the creation of the Department of Learning and Achievement.

Thank you,

Tom Thistleton