

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
HB 166 Biennial Operating Budget 2020 -2021
Academic Distress Commissions
Wednesday, May 29, 2019

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on FY 2020-21 Operating Budget and Academic Distress Commissions. My name is Henry Patterson, and I am the past Vice-Chairman of the Lorain Academic Distress Commission from 2013-2017. I am also the father of a 2019 Graduate of Lorain High School and have two other daughters in the Lorain City Schools, and a niece, nephew or cousin in almost every grade at the Lorain City Schools.

Included in my written testimony, you will find Exhibit "A" which is a letter I wrote to Governor Kasich following the adoption of HB 70. This letter will give you a little context of where we were at in 2015 and includes seven recommended concerns after the adoption of HB 70. Exhibit "B" is a letter that I sent to Governor DeWine this past January which pointed out twelve of the deficiencies in the current law and a request to form a commission to review the law. Exhibit "C" is the testimony that I recently presented before the State School Board which provided additional background regarding our ADC and a plea to fix the law. Finally, Exhibit "D" includes draft legislation that you might consider in crafting a new version of the law regarding Academic Distress Commissions in Ohio.

With that background, I come before you today to state that I believe that an Academic Distress Commission can be effective to help districts that continue to struggle. However, I can tell you from personal experience five very important considerations:

1. **A turnaround will not be fast.** Though I am far from an expert in education, I learned during my four years that change would be incremental and will take time. Yes, there is some low-lying fruit; however the real challenge for Districts in Academic Distress is that there are issues and circumstances that occur outside of the school day and environment that make rapid and lasting change a challenge. Public schools in particular don't have the luxury of picking or choosing who they get to educate. From students who have behavioral issues to those that have IEP's and all points in-between, public schools are charged and challenged with educating everyone, no matter what their circumstance, who steps across their doors and this is a reality that is often the 800-pound elephant in the room.
2. **A turnaround will not be easy.** Just because the State of Ohio decrees that things must improve Academically in four years doesn't mean that it can be done! The challenge for any law governing Academic Distress on a statewide level is that there is no one panacea for every student, school or district. If it were that easy, then we could simply require a district to adopt the curriculum of a district that is excellent and be done! The reality is that each child learns differently and that a one-size fits all approach is rarely effective. You will find that there are pockets of excellence and frustration in the same classroom, building and district. Moreover, the challenge is in replicating success year after year. Finally, I hope everyone realized how difficult it is to attract and retain quality educational professionals when they appear to be punished for working in a district that is in Academic Distress. The current model would appear to be great for educational mercenaries who are rarely around in the long-run.

3. **A turnaround will not be cheap.** If the State of Ohio truly wants to address Academic Distress in Ohio, they must be willing to step-up to the plate financially. There is a trend among District's in Academic Distress: they are among the most impoverished in the state. Consequently, there are issues that impact learning that go well beyond the class day. Wrap-around services on a large scale are a necessity if there is a true desire to move the dial for educational success. This will require that to be involved at the local level and for resources to provide oversight, training and support for any district in Academic Distress. The state cannot financially abandon a district once it is placed in academic emergency; You broke it, you bought it!

4. **There must be a high degree of local involvement and control.** Without true buy-in and involvement from the local community, no educational turnaround effort can be successful. Substituting a non-elected ADC and CEO who is not subject to local accountability, for a locally elected school board is a recipe for disinterest and acrimony. The current model asks the parents and taxpayers to "trust-us" without valuing their input. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the new model will be any better than the old model of instruction. Finally, as dysfunctional as any school board might be, the voters still have the option of voting out their elected representatives at the ballot; under the current model there is no such local check – however, the taxpayers are left to foot the bill.

5. **There must be a skilled, engaged and compensated Academic Distress Commission.** A functional and representative Academic Distress Commission with some ties to the community being served is of utmost importance to drive the change in a district. Moreover, the individuals selected should have core-competencies to develop an Academic Recovery Plan and hold the CEO accountable while functioning collaboratively with the local school board and community. While volunteers are fine, there is also a need to compensate individuals to ensure that the best individuals are engaged and have an incentive to do the best job possible.

As a final matter, I wish to add that HB 70 is broken and needs to be replaced. Had the law been put together with a functional and engaged Academic Distress Commission, a requirement that the CEO work collaboratively with the local school board and public, additional financial resources for wrap-around services and a more robust role for the Ohio Department of Education I believe that this model could have had more success. To leave this broken law in-place which strips our community of local control leaves me and many Lorain residents only one option: to never vote for a school levy and allow the state to take complete control of the district. If there are any questions from the Committee, I am happy to answer at this time.

Respectfully,



Henry T. Patterson, Jr.