



Representative Kent Smith
8th House District

House Bill 626 Testimony

Education and Career Readiness Committee

December 4, 2018

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and member of the Education and Career Readiness Committee. Thank you very much for providing us an opportunity to explain why state takeovers of public school districts should be stopped.

As the members of this Committee are aware, Youngstown, Lorain and most recently East Cleveland City school districts have been taken over by state government as a result of House Bill 70 as passed in the 131st General Assembly. I have the privilege of representing East Cleveland, so a large portion of my remarks will focus on that community.

It is important to be mindful of the economic conditions in East Cleveland. A recent report said East Cleveland is the poorest community in Ohio and the 4th poorest city in the nation. The median household income in East Cleveland is \$19,953 whereas the statewide average is \$50,674. Every single East Cleveland student (100%) are economically disadvantaged according to ODE data. 27.2% have a Special Education designation which is almost 3 times the state average.

In spite of these substantial challenges East Cleveland City Schools have made tremendous progress.

They saw improvement in 15 of 21 state performance measures.

Their suspension rate has dropped 47.3% over the last three years.

The 5-year graduation rate is 75% which is only ten percentage points below the Ohio average.

The District's Career Tech program earned a "B" in Post Program Outcomes.

The district earned a C on their K-3 literacy rate, which means they were successful in getting struggling readers back on track. Specially 167 students were identified as being off track and EC teachers were able to get 81 of those kids back on track.

Their four elementary schools received grades of A, B or C for their Valued Added / Progress measure.

This progress is due to an extremely talented core of teachers and administrators, over 70% of which have a master's degree and they average 15 years of classroom experience.

Have they been successful on all fronts? No. but considering the challenging student population that they are responsible for, they should be lauded for their heroic efforts not subjected to takeover by an out-of-town entity who has zero knowledge of the community and no accountability to the East Cleveland voters.

The East Cleveland mid-school year state takeover was announced at the beginning of the school year and has already had a negative impact on the academic community. District enrollment has dropped by 12%. Twenty academic positions have not been filled. This number represents the highest number of vacancies in the history of the district. Mid-year school personnel resignations have also exceeded the normal average. What we have seen in about 3 months of state control is more chaos and uncertainty injected into an already challenging classroom setting.

The other two communities experiencing state takeovers have also raised concern. Pastor Kenneth Simon of Youngstown shared his concerns about the district's finances. Last week he said, "prior to the implementation of the Youngstown Plan, the district had a \$23 million-dollar surplus. Two and a half years later, the district is nearing a deficit because of the unchecked decisions created by this model that has no accountability. In addition, the district is spending approximately \$8 million dollars less in the classroom, which means more is being spent on personnel that have no direct impact on classroom performance."

Also last week, the President of the Lorain School Board, Tony Dimacchia, was quoted in a newspaper article saying the Lorain School Board had not spoken to the District CEO, David Hardy in almost a year and a half.

There is evidence that these state takeovers were not deserved, and have led to more problems than solutions, but it also hinders the voice of the people by removing local governance. This is not just about three current school districts, this is also about Democracy and the grand American experiment.

In America, the right to vote is a fundamental freedom. We are the leading democracy in the world and our election system ought to be free, fair and accessible.

We, serving 11.5 million Ohioans, should be about the cause of advancing the integrity of our elections. There should be no barriers that prevent eligible citizens from having their voice heard. In short, we should be protecting Democracy not preventing it.

Finally, let me read from a Toledo Blade editorial from September 24, 2018 entitled Department of Education Should Help Schools, Not Grade Them. The Blade wrote, "After 20 years of administering proficiency tests, the state of Ohio seems no closer to closing the gap between poorly performing districts and high performing districts. In fact, it could be argued that it is the state of Ohio and in

particular those in charge of education policy – the governor, the Department of Education, and the Ohio General Assembly – who deserve an F mark when it comes to education in Ohio.

Every Ohio child can change the world. Perhaps the next great Lordstown innovation is currently in a Youngstown classroom. Perhaps the solution to the Lake Erie algae crisis is a Lorain student. Perhaps the next great civil rights leader is walking down an East Cleveland school hallway. Every Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland child has infinite potential, but we need to get serious about investing in our future workforce.

We would ask that the Committee support HB 626 and end these state takeovers. We would be happy to answer any questions the Committee might have.