

Testimony in Support of SJR1
from Diana Evans Vance

Chairman Coley, Vice Chairman Uecker, Ranking Member Yuko and members of the Committee –

Over the past 50 years, education has become a lot like agriculture. In the Mid-20th Century, we succumbed to the idea that “bigger” agriculture was better, more efficient, and of higher quality through more control and consistency. Today, we know “local” is often preferable: It uplifts local economies and provides healthier, fresher and more appealing food. State control of Ohio’s schools provides those same advantages.

Ohioans send a lot of money to Washington. While some states like Mississippi receive \$3 in federal spending for every \$1 sent to the federal treasury, Ohioans receive less than \$1 for every \$1 sent. Annually, many Ohio school districts face failing levies. Wouldn’t Ohio’s money be better spent financing schools in Ohio rather than paying D.C. to administer and re-distribute our money?

Further, federal mandates have translated into lost instructional time; more testing; overwhelming data analysis; loss of field trips, guest speakers and electives; as well as diminished parental input. Schools are less nimble to adjust, change and innovate. And for what gain? The federal infusion of money with its increased intrusion has produced consistently a harvest of mediocre results at best. So, “bigger” has not proved “better.”

So, how does minimizing federal reach benefit Ohio’s citizens? When I entered teaching, there was an “art” to it. Each school year, I began with the curriculum in one hand and a new crop of students with diverse needs, interest, backgrounds and abilities in the other. I had the freedom to design instruction to reflect each class, to take advantage of “aha” moments, to address parent concerns, and to be responsive to students. Our class became a living, growing organism that grew and evolved. Unfortunately, as the reach of Washington increased, my role as nurturer of learning and grower of human beings was diminished; my “art” became “craft.” Requirements to conform to meet the needs of the system rather than the needs of my students in order to comply with federal mandates slowly became the driving force in their education. By retirement, I was required to adopt lesson plans in lockstep with my colleagues so that we all taught the same things in the same order at the same time and met artificial schedules. My students were feed, watered, pruned, and warmed according to THE schedule, not according to their needs. Returning to state control of education will allow us to tend to our children by allowing them to germinate on their own time schedule and benefit from different soil conditions, water levels, light and fertilizers. After all, pumpkins, peas and pears all have different growth requirements and seasons. Whether it is through public education, home schooling, charter schools, online academies or private schools, the desires of parents and the needs of children must guide our choices for them so that we provide safe, healthy, nurturing and inviting environments that provide the educational growth that Ohio’s children deserve.

The US Constitution leaves the responsibility for K-12 education with the states only. Setting high standards for education is the right thing to do, but those standards should be decided in Ohio. Just as “Eat Local, Buy Local” is now encouraged, we need to “Live Local, Educate Local.” Adoption of a SJR1 can put us on the path to Ohio control of its schools. Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.