Introduce yourself – including identify yourself as a member of the LWVO lobby corps

The LWVO is an advocate for public education, and believes one of the most profound responsibilities of the Ohio Legislature is to provide for a thorough and efficient system of common schools that are free and open to all. Adequate state resources, distributed fairly among school districts in Ohio is fundamental to fulfilling this obligation.

Our democracy is dependent on a well-educated and an informed electorate. Our system of common schools plays this essential role. We, like you, are interested in ensuring that public schools offer all students, regardless of where they live, access to opportunities that help them become lifelong learners, productive members of our society, and good citizens.

Quality matters to us. We urge you to increase the state’s investment in our local school districts. This is the most fundamental way you can provide for the foundation needed to offer a quality education, and the way to promote equal opportunity.  Without equal opportunity, accountability is unfair.

While the Ohio legislature has seen fit to use accountability based on test scores as the lever to create quality, we believe this is neither appropriate nor effective. When consequences are tied to the results of standardized tests, it is a misuse of a standardized test. No test is adequate to measure quality, or evaluate teaching, or should be the basis for taking over the governance of a school district.

Quality is a very complex phenomenon, and it deserves a robust definition. Test results, which are most often a reflection of the economic status of the test takers, are a very limited way of gauging quality. And connecting consequences to them, is a very harmful way to force improvement. It doesn’t really work. It encourages a focus on improving test results, which both undermines high quality instruction and negates the validity of the test itself as a fair measure of learning.  Ask any teacher and they will tell you it is killing student curiosity and making school an unsafe and tense place.

The LWVO opposes state takeover of local school districts as a consequence of the state report card grade. It is not a fair use of tests and it violates a fundamental of appropriate governance, decision making by locally elected board of education. I urge you to support HB 154, the language to end Academic Distress Commissions and support local problem solving that was adopted by the House and now appears in the budget.

It is my understanding that a working group that many of you belong to, has developed an alternative to Academic Distress Commission as the way to turn around schools that do not perform well as measured by the state report card. While the stated goals of the Ohio Transformation Plan are consistent with our commitment to providing all children a quality education, it is neither the right time nor the right strategy.

1. It is only in a draft stage- so it seems premature to act on it.
2. It continues to assume that a failed report card grade is caused by a governance problem and a governance change will bring improved performance.
3. It does not end state take over. It appears in the proposed plan that a district has 2 years to make substantial changes before a takeover is imposed. When planning for change is supposed to take as much as a year, it’s hard to see any real change in two years. This is a set up for failure.
4. It is not clear how progress is to be measured that would free a district from oversight, nor does it offer a robust approach to identifying failure.
5. It will continue to punish schools and school districts that serve children who live in poverty and will simply not get to the core causes of their poverty.

The outcome of our education system is way broader and more humane than a once in time measure on a test. Ending state takeover is the first step the legislature can take to right the wrong of attaching high stakes consequences to test scores.