**Senate Testimony regarding ADC’s from the viewpoint of an ADC Member/Teacher by Steve Cawthon**

Hello, my name is Steve Cawthon. I have been an unrelenting advocate to deal with HB70 and ADC’s with my numerous phone calls, emails and trips to Columbus to speak out against Academic Distress Commissions, HB 70, CEO’s and the dysfunctional state takeover model. However, as I sit here in the latter part of September, I once again find myself at my computer typing a letter to ask the powers that be to do something that one would think should have already been done. It is time to take action. As a history teacher, I think of Thomas Paine when he wrote “Common Sense” and how he wanted to put into language and a style that everyone could understand in regards for the need for American Independence. I feel that we are at that point with the ADC and the damage that this current model is doing to our students and the need for its immediate end. It just makes sense to do what is right to eliminate Academic Distress Commissions and the CEO model; use a “Common Sense” approach.

Just to refresh your memories, I am an appointed member of the Lorain Academic Commission and the only member who is both serving on the ADC and as a classroom teacher. I believe it is my responsibility to express the concerns of those in the trenches and the community of Lorain. As a proud educator in Lorain City Schools since 1991 and a parent of a Lorain City Schools graduate, it pains me to see what is happening in Lorain and across Ohio. Our students, parents, staff and community members all have been negatively impacted by this legislation.

Let me be very clear, I am strongly opposed to Academic Distress Commissions, HB 70, and the CEO state take over model. I am in support of legislation that will return local control to districts and allow for true collaboration between communities and the state of Ohio. The idea of an ADC and CEO being an effective model for school change is a false narrative. In Lorain we have seen students, administrators and staff that have left the district due to the toxic environment that exists. In fact, one phrase that seems to be very poignant that was mentioned to me by someone from the outside is that it has become a “mental prison” for those who are still dealing with the state takeover.

I also know that the most recent propaganda narrative that has been perpetuated in the past week since the state report card has been released is the amazing job of “rising up” the Titans of Lorain the current administration has done. In addition, with that “they” should stay in place along with the elements of the ADC and HB70. I would in fact argue that the teachers succeeded in earning improving marks on the state report card based upon their amazing efforts in the face of questionable leadership and continual obstacles. There is also a high level of curiosity as to the true metrics of how the state report card is figured out. The formula seems to be one concocted in a secret laboratory somewhere that brings into question its ability to evaluate schools. The current data that is being praised as amazing, is similar to that data of 2016 and where we used to be. As Dr. Jim Lloyd, the Superintendent of Olmsted Falls City Schools stated, “I would encourage my colleagues in Ohio to reject and speak out against Ohio's antiquated accountability model and its over-emphasis on standardized tests and how it ranks and rates schools and is a model that is politically driven. The time is now for real transformation.”

In regards to the historical context of HB 70. This bill was geared toward providing wrap around services and assistance for districts that were facing academic struggles and needed a boost. It then somehow turned into a state takeover bill, hurriedly passed in June of 2015 and created ADC’s and the CEO model. HB 70 at its core, is a disturbing un-American bill that went against the basic principles established by our Founding Fathers as the cornerstone of our democracy. The phrase “no taxation, without representation” is once again a pointed argument against those who have invented this state takeover as Lorain’s local tax dollars are being used without true local oversight as the elected board of education and the people of the community have little say or role in the decision making in its own school district. Essentially, HB 70 disenfranchised the citizens of Lorain and all of Ohio.

For some reason in my numerous trips to Columbus it seems that some legislators feel that the CEO has been “picked on” or has been “unjustly attacked” by those on the opposite side of the argument. That could not be further from the truth. He has been criticized due to very questionable decision-making and poor leadership skills. Under HB70, the leadership of the CEO and his chosen administrative team have been guilty of numerous detrimental points of concern that have occurred in Lorain to our students and community. Just recently, in the latter part of the summer, we have seen numerous problematic decisions made by this leadership group. For example, the purchase of a dysfunctional reading program, which still has not provided the proper resources to those educators who are trying to teach it at the elementary level. This program is not even approved by the Ohio Department of Education. Also, the removal of a key administrator at the high school who was instrumental in organizing the building and putting the schedule together. Furthermore, concerning issues with the treasurer that forced him to seek employment in another district and that helped to spur an unnecessary panic of whether or not nearly 900 employees would receive a paycheck. Keep in mind, the treasurer was still employed and performing his duties. In fact, he is still on the job as his issue of employment is being resolved through legal channels. In addition, compounding the treasurer situation with other questionable financial issues, such as pay raises for certain administrators, once again proving the drama never seems to end for those in Lorain and these are issues that should have been avoided.

Other issues that are extremely problematic include:

**\*Ineffective rating of the CEO for 2018-19 by the ADC**

**\*Problematic Standards Based Grading Implementation**

**\*District Shared SLO (shared attribution) that heavily goes against the ODE recommendations.**

**\*Poor** **Restorative Justice Implementation for discipline**

\***Lack of transparency**

\***Issues with report cards**

**\*Inability to work with the board of education and local elected officials**

**\*Numerous** **Curriculum issues**

**\*Reduction in Supports and Services**

**\*Consistent Negative Feedback in surveys**

**\*Financial Concerns/Spending**

**\*Levy Concern: Loss of $3 mil per year & $21 mil over the next 7 if renewal is not passed.**

\***Lorain High Teachers reapply (fired) for their jobs fiasco**

**\*End of the year non-renewal of teachers who were building reps**

**\*Some** **unqualified & inexperienced administration who have failed to build trust and improve morale.**

**\*Inaccurately reporting teacher attendance so that it appeared as if they did not report to school at a high %.**

**\*Public records request responsibility taken away from the treasurer and is now the responsibility of ??**

The time has come to end this carnage and the unmitigated disaster known as HB70. With that, the ADC needs to be dissolved & the return of local control to the communities needs to take place.

I know there is some question regarding components of new legislation to repeal and replace HB70 and the idea it turns the solution back to people who have “driven the bus into the ditch.” My response to those charges would be that first of all public education needs to be funded properly which the Ohio Supreme Court ruled as such many years ago. Assist local districts with the issues that they face instead of trying to punish them. Fix the flawed state report card and standardized testing model that has been proven ineffective. Moreover, allow for local control, which is key component to American democracy. The bottom line is to stop perpetuating a misleading narrative. In our country the premise has always been if a community is unhappy with its elected officials or a board of education, VOTE THEM OUT! It’s the democratic way and has been for 243 years! We hold members of the House and the Senate to that standard without a “takeover model” when their jobs are not performed up to the standards of the citizens of Ohio.

It is important to remember, when the environment of the locker room changes to such a degree that the leader is no longer a positive change agent for the good of the team. Then the trust in the locker room is lost, with that, it is time to move on. It is time to change the leader. Until positive change occurs, chaos will ensue in our community. Even now as we close in on autumn, the Lorain Academic Distress Commission agrees that the time has come to transition away from this madness. The Academic Distress Commission model is simply flawed and “out of touch and out of time” as the situation has created many challenges and issues, as it has become a destructive force in the Lorain community. I think it is safe to say each ADC member has gone through their own personal hell in dealing with this situation.

In fact, Paolo DeMaria, Ohio State Superintendent has commented publically regarding HB 70, that is has “too much hostility and too many “challenges” to work well.” He went on to say, “by having the state impose itself on districts, instead of working with them to bring change, too much acrimony is created.” Mr. DeMaria is absolutely correct and the healing needs to begin and begin immediately.

We need to create a collaborative new direction for Lorain and all of Ohio as we move forward with local stakeholders and the ODE as partners in this endeavor to make educating the students of Ohio truly a key priority. This also means not replacing HB 70 with another state take over model with a new name that will invite charters, big money and individuals who are not experienced in the field of education to attempt to use their “magic potion” to fix things.

What should we do to heal the wounds of HB70?

**I will call it “A Common Sense” approach to creating positive change with the state and the local districts:**

\***Local Control and Checks and Balances**: Have a true collaborative approach with the state and the locals working together. That is the only way to improve the situations that districts across the state find themselves in. Hostile takeovers haven’t worked.

\***Build Trust**: The lack of experience, credentials and professional leadership skills have hurt our students and has fostered a sense of low morale throughout the district.

**\*Wrap Around Services**: hire more social workers, counselors, medical professionals that can help our students.

**\*Smaller Class Sizes:** to deal with the dynamic needs of our students.

**\*Safety/Discipline:** Students need proper structure and consistency in the school environment.

**\*Curriculum**: Needs to be evaluated, the lack of cohesion/pacing/consistency/materials and resources is a concern.

\***Restructure the State Testing Model:** It is dysfunctional and needs to be improved.

\***The State Helping:** Support local school districts instead of punishing them.

It is my professional opinion as a long time and experienced educator that the Senate include language from HB 154 and that this body vote to dissolve Academic Distress Commissions, end HB 70 and support effective legislation that will restore collaboration for public education in Ohio. Our schools should have a fair and impartial opportunity to allow their unique social and economic realities to shape the structures that will allow their districts to prosper. Remember that school districts are communities, and the time for community takeovers has passed. Let us work together to make our public education experience a model for the rest of our great nation to follow.  With that, Ohio needs to return local control to the districts, which is part of the fiber of the American ideology that our Founding Fathers so cherished, fix the flawed state report card/testing model, properly fund public education and “collaborate” with communities to improve our schools. The State School Board unanimously passed a resolution against HB 70 & the House has already voiced their thoughts on the issue with the overwhelming passage of HB 154. I ask this body, along with Governor DeWine, to be on the right side of history and stand with public education in Ohio. Help leave a lasting legacy that all Ohioans can be proud of and not leave us with another “American Tragedy.” Remember, Lorain is watching, Ohio is watching and the country is watching what you will do. I implore the Senate to take corrective action as most importantly, as the musical Hamilton states “history has its eyes on you.”

Thank you for your time

Steve Cawthon

Lorain Academic Distress Commission Member/Teacher