



Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill 320 Testimony
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Buckeye Association of School Administrators
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Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding Senate Bill (SB) 320. I am Kevin Miller, Director of Governmental Relations for the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA).

At their June 16, 2020, meeting, the members of the BASA Legislative Committee meeting passed a resolution not to support HB 320; however, I present this testimony as an interested party for two reasons:

1. The motion was representative of BASA's Legislative Committee's stance and is not an official position of BASA. The recommendation of the Legislative Committee would need to be considered by BASA's Executive Committee members who would then determine BASA's official position. The Executive Committee has not met to consider the Legislative Committee's recommendation; however, over 40 BASA members sit on the Legislative Committee and I felt it was important that their voices be heard as the Senate Education Committee considers SB 320.
2. There are elements of SB 320 which are supported by the members of the Legislative Committee. The bill specifies that school districts will determine whether to be open for instruction for the 2020-2021 school year and, if a district or school opens, it will determine what health safety measures and guidelines to implement to address COVID-19. The members of the Legislative Committee appreciate Senator Huffman's support of local control as he developed this legislation.

At the same time, the members struggled with the component of the bill that would prohibit other public officials from preventing a district or school from opening its schools, causing its schools to close, or requiring a district to adopt health safety measures and guidelines to address COVID-19.

Superintendents are not health experts. They do not have expertise in analyzing the pandemic-related data that drives decisions at the state level. They do not have access to all the tools and research that guided decisions to close Ohio's school buildings this past spring and decisions that have guided the re-opening of Ohio. This is what prohibited the Legislative Committee members from supporting SB 320. In the end, they felt that just as they are entrusted with making decisions for their school districts, there are times when they must entrust Governor DeWine and other officials with making decisions in the best interest of the state of Ohio.

However, the Legislative Committee's resolution not to support SB 320 in its current form also included a request that there should be consideration in statewide decisions to provide regional or county flexibility, support, and guidance, allowing for exemptions and/or waivers that recognize the unique circumstances of Ohio's varied geographic areas.

We encourage the members of the Senate Education Committee to amend the bill's language to maintain the right of officials to make decisions in the best interest of Ohio's students when necessary, while at the same time encouraging those officials to recognize local differences in how the pandemic is impacting the various geographic regions of the state. This might best be done by filtering state-wide directives through county health agencies, giving them the flexibility to work with schools to develop local directives that address each community's reality.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback regarding SB 320.