

Senate Education Committee
Senate Bill 388 Testimony
David J. Brand, Superintendent/CEO
New Philadelphia City School District
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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 speak to you today regarding Senate Bill (SB) 388. My name is David Brand and I am the Superintendent/CEO of the New Philadelphia City School District.

Our District is located in Tuscarawas County in East Central Ohio. We have over 3,200 students. There are seven other K12 public schools and one career center in Tuscarawas County.

I am here as a proponent of SB 388. SB 388 permits a school district board of education to employ an individual as a substitute teacher according to the district's own educational requirements for the 2020-2021 school year only. The bill also declares an emergency, which would allow this legislation to provide immediate help for school districts. SB 388 is a companion bill to House Bill 756.

We have been blessed to have low numbers of positive cases of COVID19 in our school district. We have been able to sustain 5-days per week in-person learning all school year. However, close contact from interactions outside of the school setting has caused multiple teachers to be quarantined and unable to safely come to work.

The only reason we have even considered going to remote learning is due to a lack of substitute teachers. Therefore, substitute teachers are critical to keeping our students in school and safely learning. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, we were experiencing a shortage of certified classroom substitutes. We have had 20% decline in our substitute teacher pool resulting in fill rates of under 50%. Therefore we have been required to have available staff to cover for each other, this includes fellow teachers, principals, school counselors, and central office administrators including myself.

Typically, a substitute must hold a bachelor's degree along with a substitute license issued by the Ohio Department of Education. SB 388 allows a local board of education to determine the requirements for substitutes that they will use for the rest of the 2020-21 school year. However, the bill specifies that a substitute teacher employed under the bill must be of good moral character, as prescribed for licensure, and must submit to a criminal records check and not have a record of disqualifying offenses for school employment, as required under continuing law.

As you consider this bill, there are a few items I would like you to consider. I have heard from multiple other superintendents whose students are attending in person that if they have to go to remote learning, it will not be because of the number of COVID cases among the student body or the number of students who have to be quarantined—it will be because they don't have enough substitutes to cover for absent teachers. As you know, substitute teachers are in shortage and this is causing more districts to move to remote than actual positive COVID cases.

Secondly, other states have different requirements for a substitute license than Ohio. I think making a change to our requirements like I show below will dramatically help all schools and students without lowering our true standards. For example, in Indiana, a sub must hold a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate, be 18 years of age or older, and meet the requirements set forth in the screening process of the school employer. In Illinois, a substitute teacher is required to hold an Associate's degree, and not a Bachelor's degree. In North Carolina, substitutes are not regulated by the state, allowing each district to determine the requirements for the subs they hire. I attained undergraduate school in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Their requirements are the completion of 90 semester hours. This helped both me as a pre-service teacher and also the school districts. I was able to substitute teach while going through school. This meant I was much more prepared for student teaching, job interviews, and my first job. With so many schools in remote learning or moving in and out of in-person learning, our current pre-service future teachers are not as prepared for their future careers as they typically would be. This Bill will help school districts and students immediately, and it will also help in the future.

A third item to note is how the use of technology has changed the role of the substitute. In New Philadelphia City School and many other districts where each student has access to a Chromebook the teacher often records the lessons ahead of time and the students can access the lessons in the absence of the teacher. For some districts where a teacher is quarantined at home, the teacher is often still connecting with the class via Zoom or another virtual tool to provide instruction, but a substitute is needed to be physically present in the classroom with the students. In both of these situations, the substitute is monitoring the students and not providing actual instruction.

SB 388 would help to resolve substitute issues for school districts as we seek to deliver instruction in the most appropriate manner for our students and our communities. I encourage committee members to act swiftly on SB 388 to provide relief as soon as possible for Ohio's schools.

I am glad to answer any questions you might have.