

Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
Regarding House Bill 70
Interested Party Testimony
May 13, 2019

Chair Terhar, Vice-Chair Lehner , Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education.

I am Dr Tom Lasley, currently CEO of Learn to Earn Dayton and formally Dean, School of Education and Health Sciences at the University of Dayton.

Let me begin with a rather famous quote from H L Mencken: *For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple and wrong.*

I would argue that HB 70 represents in reality what H L Mencken describes. Failing schools do indeed represent a complex problem; they are failing for a lot of different reasons and we all want, for the sake of the students that these schools serve, a good and viable answer for addressing school failure.

Unfortunately, what Ohio served up was an answer that was CLEAR, SIMPLE and WRONG.

I believe that the State was trying to do the right thing. The intentions of HB 70 are indeed the right intentions: Create stronger, better schools for students who are currently in weak, failing and significantly under-performing schools.

HB 70 assumes, at least tacitly...

1 THAT all schools in an “academically distressed” school district are failing

2 THAT the most critical asset in a school district is the superintendent

3 THAT a one-size-fits-all intervention will foster school transformation for all schools

4 THAT leaders can be externally imposed and appointed...and then that they will be effective in creating a culture and climate of success

5 THAT a plan for school transformation can be developed and implemented with limited community buy-in and investment

I would argue that the reason HB 70 has failed to meet the expectations of so many people is because these assumptions are largely false, though some grains of truth can be found in almost all of them.

Some of us who have been studying this issue of turning around failing schools would suggest that Ohio’s approach to school transformation needs to be more nuanced and grounded on the following principles:

1 REJECT a one-size-fits-all approach for all failing school districts

2 SEEK ways to place the State in a partnership with local communities in the decision about identifying the right local leaders to lead the transformation process

3 ENSURE the presence of a committed team of local leaders (i.e., school board, school superintendent, building level educators, civic and community leaders) working together on school transformation to make meaningful and sustainable change. I also think it is important to find ways to significantly involve parents and students.

4 PROVIDE technical assistance for school districts to create and implement the plans necessary for systemic change

5 CREATE an entity (some type of state level technical assistance board or panel) that has the ability to thoughtfully work with schools to oversee a root-cause analysis of the problems and issues that are fostering failing schooling practices AND can approve and strategically assist with the implementation of a transformation plan that has the continuous improvement metrics needed to track and document positive academic progress

I represent a group of individuals who care, like you, very deeply about the success of Ohio's students. Ohio is an under-producer of intellectual capital (i.e., persons with marketable credentials or degrees). That situation MUST be changed for Ohio's economy to be viable and vital. It can only be changed if we have schools that foster student success.

What we propose can be seen in the graphic that I have provided to you. That graphic makes clear that we are advocating for more local control, coupled with strategic state involvement and investment.

By WE, I am referring to a group of key leaders and stakeholders across the State of Ohio who have an interest in this issue. That group has not always agreed on the details, but there has been better agreement on an overall approach going forward which specifically would include....

A school district could remain in ADC and continue with its current defined course of action...

OR

A district could enter into what we are describing as the Ohio School Transformation Process (OSTP), putting ADC in abeyance for 2-3 years.

The OSTP consists of the following fundamental steps....

1 Require each “distressed” school district to complete a thorough root cause analysis that identifies the primary and secondary reasons for the poor performance of the school and the underperformance of the students

2 Require each school district to develop *School and District Transformation and Implementation Plan* that address the root causes for school failures

3 Create a state-level **Transformation and for Student Success Panel** that reviews and approves the distressed school district’s Transformation and Implementation Plans

4 Identify specific state-approved technical assistance providers that have a demonstrated track record of success in transforming under-performing schools and that can align their services with the school district’s *School and District Transformation and Implementation Plan*

5 Provide resources that enable the distressed school district to secure the services of a state-approved technical assistance provider

6 Ensure that the school district has the leadership team in place to implement the *School and District Transformation and Implementation Plan* ...and that means that the school district MUST show that it has in place (or can put in place) a leadership team with aligned commitments to the *School and District Transformation and Implementation Plan*. That district leadership team would consist of, for example, the superintendent, the board of education president, and the teachers’ union leadership as well

as a representative from key stakeholder groups (i.e., parents and civic and business leaders).

I share these steps in summary fashion. We have put together a white paper that provides more definition for what each of these fundamental steps would entail and I would be happy to share that document with you...

My point is simple: The current ADC approach is failing to meet expectations because it is based on imposing an approach rather than on fostering a partnership with stakeholders who develop and implement a thoughtful, evidenced-based plan, and who are FULLY invested in its success.

If you do a google search on transforming failing schools, one of the ideas that surfaces relates to the importance of culture and climate. One author captured it this way: *Culture and climate are the foundation on which reform can be [and must be] built. It's imperative for leaders to create school environments where there are high expectations for student behavior and learning. It's imperative that the culture be centered on high expectations for staff to reach every student and provide rich instruction and rigorous curriculum. The positive energy must be focused on a common mission and vision that is embraced by every stakeholder. Schools that follow the model of improving culture and climate, increasing student engagement, and building professional capacity of teachers, will see results.*

The state cannot impose the ingredients that are essential for school success: a collaborative culture and a climate of high expectations. These two key ingredients can only occur through local commitment and investment. The solution for school transformation proffered by the State of Ohio should be one that ensures the presence of and builds on ALL the different types of

local community assets that must be in place for schools to succeed and for students to learn.