



Ohio Senate

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Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on SB 178.

My purpose of Senate Bill 178 is to improve students’ remediation rates, to establish education protocols around student purpose, to drive better outcomes in education, and to prepare students through more effective career readiness.

When I first came to the Ohio House in 2015, I was shocked to learn about the failures of our education system.

In 2016, my local leaders called me in to discuss educational and workforce challenges within Seneca County dealing with state education.

I was shocked by Ohio’s extremely high remediation rate for students entering college from our high schools. According to 2021’s Ohio Remediation Report, the remediation rate for students enrolling in a math or English remediation class sits at 19.3%.¹

Meanwhile, many of our K-12 students in Ohio are falling behind. Recently, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released its nationwide report. In Ohio, the results of that snapshot for our fourth graders and eighth graders’ learning indicate that a worrying number have fallen drastically behind in both reading and math². Other state-level data from the last school year further evidences troubling losses in student learning that have occurred in communities statewide and that, left unaddressed, will compound into steadily worse student outcomes for years to come. This data, coupled with our staggering remediation rate, demonstrates a cycle of disappointment in our education system, and, most importantly, shows we are failing our children.

In addition to academic struggles, we are not connecting our students to their purpose. Going back to 2016, as a state representative, as a follow up to my local in-district meetings, I had an informative meeting at the Ohio Department of Education, where I discovered there were 4 paths towards high school graduation. It was obvious that the traditional path, taking the ACT or SAT and going to college, was the most promoted. I’m guessing that others were not aware of the other 3 options available to them. All too frequently, these programs are not considered equals to traditional pathways, yet they

¹ [2021 Ohio Remediation Report](#)

² [National Assessment of Educational Progress in Ohio](#)

deserve elevation and promotion for what they can teach students about their futures and themselves.

The meeting at ODE was such an aha moment, that I actually can show you the picture of the white board showing the presentation. The failure to recognize other pathways creates the stigma that career tech is less than an adequate pathway to life success.

A career path choice is not the end of a student's educational path. In fact, it can be a stepping-stone to higher education. Many of Ohio's best higher education institutions are cognizant of this fact and its importance to the workforce.

Many pathways are employer funded, which only demonstrates the need for the workforce. An important part of this education discussion is the fact that many students are ill-prepared and end up saddled with college debt.

The evidence shows there is a need for systemic change at the state level to our education system to ensure accountability to taxpayers and for our kids. SB 178 addresses this need by refocusing our system at the state level on what matters most: our children and their future. The bill does this in several ways.

SB 178 restructures the Department of Education to create a state cabinet-level agency called the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) that will have a dual focus on primary and secondary education as well as preparing students for the workforce. This cabinet-level agency will be led by a Director appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. This creates a system similar to other states that have found world-class talent to lead their states into the 21st century and develop structures that have significantly increased student achievement through state-level actions.

(I should note that the need to view these two together is growing across the nation. In fact, I can tell you as the Midwest representative for the CSG, we recently made a change in a standing committee from Education to become Education & Workforce.)

The Department of Education and Workforce will consist of two divisions: the Division of Primary and Secondary Education and the Division of Career Technical Education. Both will be headed by deputy directors who will sit on the Governor's Executive Workforce Board. As the titles suggest, the Division of Primary and Secondary Education will include K-12 education, as well as preschool, while the Division of Career Technical Education will create and implement programing to better educate students about career-tech graduation options as well as various in-demand career opportunities, and oversee existing career oriented education for students.

The Department will be generally responsible for enforcing rules under the Ohio Administrative Code and adopting new rules as required by law through Chapter 119 rule making processes that will go through the JCARR process . The design of the Department of Education and Workforce in the bill is meant to promote communication and collaboration between schools and education leaders to ensure accountability and transparency.

Senate Bill 178 also makes changes to the State Board of Education (SBOE). The Ohio Constitution establishes the SBOE and specifies that the board selects the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Specific roles and duties are left to the General Assembly to establish through the Ohio Revised Code. It is important to note the bill does not change the current structure of the Board's membership. Instead, it establishes the duties of the Board to include: the implementation and enforcement of rules on educator licensure; the review and rendering disposition of cases involving educator or staff conduct; and the review and rendering of decisions regarding school territory transfers.

The Board also can make recommendations to the Director of the Department regarding priorities, and will continue to appoint the Superintendent of Public Instruction, who will serve as both the Board's secretary/head and an advisor to the Director of DEW. All other duties currently under the purview of the SBOE will be assigned to the new Division of Primary and Secondary Education. Duties that deal with career tech will be assigned to the Division of Career Technical Education.

Testimony demonstrated that we do not have leadership. The legislature has responded to these concerns over the years by putting in safeguards and requiring the department to take certain actions when issues occur, but the department has not always implemented these changes with fidelity. We have seen delays, lack of staff for career-tech education at suitable numbers, and countless other failures by this system. At the time of my 2016 encounter, there were approximately 4 employees in ODE's Career-Technical Education office; even now there are only 34 full-time employees in this office.

I have great respect for teachers and administrators, but why hasn't our state's leadership listened to them? I'm sure I hear what you hear, teachers just want to teach.

We cannot standardize education when every student is not standard.

The current system is failing students, and schools are struggling in other areas as well: transportation issues, capacity issues at area career-technical centers, most notably chronic absenteeism. There is inadequate accountability for these failures.

Moreover, the current structure is failing our taxpayers. Our citizens are paying for a state structure that lacks efficiency and results. For example, in 2021 the legislature enacted a new, innovative program to help low-income students customize their education through the Afterschool Child Enrichment (ACE) program. The state board was tasked with administering this program so students could access \$500 for a variety of enrichment and tutoring services. A substantial program, where over 242,000 students could have accessed tutoring to recover from COVID-19, or to advance in academic study, has fallen flat under the state board's leadership. Fewer than 20,000 parents have set up an ACE account for their children despite us being halfway through the second fiscal year of the program. At the most basic level of catching kids up from learning loss, the current state system just isn't producing results. There is no accountability for this failure to our citizens or our students and their families.

Others would agree. In hearings, proponents included superintendents from career-tech schools, a public school superintendent, local school board members, business owners and leaders from across the state, leaders in economic development, and statewide leaders in these areas we work with such as the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Ohio Business Roundtable, the NFIB, and others. Across the state, there is a strong call for accountability in education.

In summary, I believe we can do better for our children if we refocus and reenergize the state's system of administering education in Ohio. It simply is not working how it is today. As was pointed out by witnesses in committee testimony, our state's education structure is a "broken system" in which "discontinuity is not a flaw but a purposeful feature." Senate Bill 178 is about ensuring accountability for our kids, our schools, our taxpayers, our economy, and our future. Currently, there is none. Real change and bold action are the only solution. It's time we create a system that works for our kids, who deserve our best efforts for their success.

SB 178 is district driven, results oriented, and directly responsive to my constituents.

I appreciate your consideration and will respectfully answer any questions you have.