



December 12, 2022

**Testimony opposing Senate Bill 178 before the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

My name is Cynthia Peeples and I represent Honesty for Ohio Education, a statewide coalition of more than 50 organizations and hundreds of Ohioans who believe every child deserves an honest, high-quality education grounded in truth, facts, and diverse perspectives regardless of background, race, or zip code.

As Ohio families and voters, our coalition believes that a strong education is the foundation of a functioning democracy. That's one reason we are opposed to Senate Bill 178, which would eliminate the accountability of policymakers to families and voters who now exercise democratic accountability and oversight over the State Board of Education.

Currently, the State Board has the power to set a broad array of policies and priorities for Ohio public schools. SB 178 would give the governor direct control of our schools, severely limiting Ohioans' ability to interact with decision-makers about our schools. While the Board would still exist if SB 178 were to become law, Ohioans want and deserve the opportunity to meet regularly with the Board about many education issues that matter to them, not just the few areas the Board would oversee under the proposed law.

Such a significant, far-reaching change to education governance in Ohio should be the result of an inclusive, in-depth conversation that examines different approaches. It should not be a last-minute bill rushed through during a lame duck session. Until two weeks ago, SB 178 was a one-sentence placeholder bill -- it now comes in at over 2,100 pages and will quickly and dramatically change the

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**Honesty for Ohio Education**

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face of public education in our state. A bill with such significant impact requires thorough research, deliberation and debate, as well as thoughtful engagement with the people who will be most impacted by the proposed changes: Ohio families.

The Ohio Department of Education and the State Board of Education have a long history of meaningful engagement with educators, local school board members, families, and others. This committee must allow for a similar process before considering such dramatic changes. Public schools are always going to be ground zero for debates about what and how we teach because public schools bring together so many different types of people. That diversity is reflected in the makeup of the State Board, and recent debates and disagreements are not a reason to discard the democratic power of the Board.

While public education in Ohio is strong, despite pandemic-related setbacks, it may well be that work is needed to update and improve our state's public education system. There are well-established channels to do this work under the current system. Much of the testimony presented in favor of this bill suggests it will almost magically cure all the problems, perceived and real, with public education in Ohio. But this is pure conjecture -- schools will still be in the hands of local school boards and educators, and we have no reason to assume restructuring the Ohio Department of Education will somehow make schools better. Current tensions and disagreements will not go away, but they may be hidden from public view. In a democracy, it is important to be able to see, and influence, the ideas and issues our education policymakers are debating.

I urge you, on behalf of our broad coalition, to put the brakes on a bill that amounts to little more than a power grab that will rob the public of its ability to directly shape the direction of public education in our state.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have at [cpeeples@honestyforohioeducation.org](mailto:cpeeples@honestyforohioeducation.org).

***Honesty for Ohio Education*** is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition that champions honest education, affirmation of identities, cultures, and experiences, the well-being of students and educators, and local control in education. We are united in the belief that every young person deserves an honest, high-quality education grounded in facts and diverse perspectives, regardless of their background, race, or zip code. The coalition represents **nearly 50 organizations** and hundreds of students, families, and educators across Ohio.

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