



Ohio Senate

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From: Senator Bill Reineke

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RE: Sponsor Testimony: SB 178

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, and Members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 178. This bill's purpose is to improve the academic achievement and workforce skills of our students, to drive better outcomes in their education, and to prepare for more effective career readiness. Our children deserve strong educations that prepare them for their futures. We must ensure that the state's system for overseeing that process is transparent, accountable, and effective in this critical mission. In fact, it is our obligation.

When I first came to the Ohio House in 2015, I was shocked to learn the many challenges our education system faces. One shock was 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%, which demonstrates that many of our next generation of Ohioans are not prepared for post-secondary instruction or life outside the classroom.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. Back in 2016, I had an informative meeting at the Ohio Department of Education, where I discovered there are many 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, but

¹ [2021 Ohio Remediation Report](#)

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

others may not be aware of the options available to them should they choose another path, such as a career technical education. As a businessperson in the automobile industry, I have seen firsthand the benefits of students taking the career-tech education path, as we employ many of them as automotive technicians. I imagine many of you can tell similar stories you have heard from constituents who pursued this path and became skilled workers. All too frequently, these programs are not considered equals to traditional pathways, yet they deserve elevation and promotion for what they can teach students about their futures and themselves. 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 and its importance to the workforce.

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. Transparency at the state level is necessary now more than ever, so that we can ensure schools have the support they need from the state and students can access the academic and workforce skills they need to be well-educated, career-ready adults. 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.

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 programming 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. 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 State Board of Education (SBOE) and specifies that the SBOE 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 teacher 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.

Senate Bill 178 forces our education system to be accountable, which is lacking in our current structure. Our staggering remediation rate and student achievement data shows our kids are falling behind, and it is evident the current structure is not accountable for our kids' education or their futures. The current structure frequently leaves our schools at a loss. I have heard this from local superintendents in my district. Recently, I was called to a meeting with one of my districts to discuss these challenges, how to help students find internships, and how to help them succeed. It became apparent the district was not getting the aid necessary from ODE to move the needle on these plans. I've consistently heard about a lack of support provided by ODE to other schools as well. The legislature has responded 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.

The current system is failing students and schools that are struggling with transportation issues. Reynoldsburg City Schools, for example, is currently on a hybrid model due to a lack of bus drivers. The current structure is furthermore failing our students and schools when it comes to capacity issues at area career-technical centers, most notably at ones that serve students within my district. The current structure is again failing our students and schools as they try to tackle chronic absenteeism. There is inadequate accountability for these failures.

Moreover, the current structure is failing our taxpayers. Our citizens are paying for a current state structure that lacks efficiency and results. For example, in 2021 the legislature adopted 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.

Finally, the current state structure is failing our economy and state's future. Just this year, we have seen Intel, Ford, and Honda plan to set their roots or expand their operations in Ohio. They need solid, qualified workers in a variety of sectors to succeed, or they will likely bring in out-of-state workers to do the job. Yet according to the data, and based off feedback received by employers large and small across the state, our kids are not prepared for these roles. According to the Ohio Department of Higher Education, Ohio's postsecondary attainment is not keeping up with the needs of business in our state, which has led us to a massive talent gap. Between 2018 and 2028, 75% of Ohio's job growth will be in occupations requiring at least a postsecondary non-degree credential, and over 50% will require a bachelor's degree or higher.³ Despite this fact, many of our students are not receiving the education they need to pursue post-secondary education or credentials. In fact, we do not have the workforce currently to fill jobs, which is what I hear in my district constantly. When I have returned to my district following these groundbreaking announcements for our state's economy, I do not hear praise; I hear "enough" from our business leaders who say this good news will actually strain the workforce and harm their ability to hire. There is no accountability for this failure either.

In summary, I believe K-12 leadership needs to communicate with career-tech leadership. I believe we can give this 19.3% of our kids falling through the cracks a chance and focus on student purpose for them and all our kids. I believe we can handle the new influx of jobs coming to the state but importantly those jobs from employers who have been here and are already the backbone of our economy. Therefore, it is time for us to refocus and reenergize the state's system of administering education in Ohio. It simply is not working. 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.

Chairman, thank you, and I welcome questions from the committee on this proposal.

³ [Ohio Department of Higher Education: Attainment](#)