

Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Esteemed Members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

Public Education Partners (PEP) strongly opposes Senate Bill 178, a state takeover of the State School Board of Ohio and views it as a policy that will take away the rights of Ohio voters pertaining to education issues. In 2015, the Ohio Legislature passed another state takeover law called HB 70 without careful consideration and any expert guidance from public education stakeholders. That failed state takeover plan was a piece of ideological legislation that passed in the middle of the night, and now many of the same legislators are rushing to pass a state takeover of the State School Board of Ohio.

We see this state takeover as undemocratic, because it will take power away from 11 publicly elected school board members. This takeover will give unaccountable bureaucrats unlimited control of our schools. A state takeover of the school board through SB 178 is unacceptable, because giving most of the State BOE duties to the governor's office will guarantee that political interests will be served at the expense of Ohio school children and their parents.

Currently, decisions made by members of the State Board of Education are crucial to every Ohioan. Board members create academic standards and definitions, approve curriculum, and establish test benchmarks. The Board sets the policy direction for public schools and establishes policies concerning charter schools, vouchers, professional development, educational licenses, and more. Much like this committee, the state school board is focused on primary and secondary education in our great state.

Because of the State Board's influence, it's very important to have members who are true advocates for public education. Our elected state school board members serve the will of their constituents- they are not selected to serve at the pleasure of the Governor's political party, which as you know, is no friend to public education. The State Board of Education is supposed to be a non-partisan organization, but the decisions now made by the state board under the current duties of that office would be guided by partisan political power over K-12 education.

What a travesty that SB 178 will incapacitate the state BOE's authority and award it to cabinet members most likely appointed by political favor. America's representative democracy is the best way for Ohioans to address accountability and oversight of our government leaders to make sure that they promote sound education policies that follow the will of the people and not the interests of education profiteers.

In 1953, Ohio voters passed a constitutional amendment that established an all-elected state board of education and a superintendent of public instruction to be appointed by that board, which indicated an intention to separate the Department of Education from the governor's office.

If the perceived notion is that the BOE is now dysfunctional, then Ohio needs to return to an all-elected state school board using legitimate district maps that are not politically gerrymandered.

Now is not the time to rush through Senate Bill 178, because the public hasn't even had access to the full 2,100 page document. Public education stakeholders only saw the text last week, even though the head of the Ohio Christian Education Network revealed during last week's testimony that he had access to the full document weeks ago.

Ohio politicians must not circumvent the will of the people with this fast-moving piece of legislation. If you do, your constituents can all say GOODBYE to the accountability and oversight of Ohio education issues guaranteed by the power of the vote.

Please REJECT Senate Bill 178!

Jeanne Melvin and the
Board of Public Education Partners