

OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
OHIO HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
JEFF WENSING – OEA VICE PRESIDENT

MAY 9, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Ohio House Primary & Secondary Education Committee. My name is Jeff Wensing. I am a math teacher in Parma City Schools and the current OEA Vice President. On behalf of the Ohio Education Association (OEA) and its approximately 120,000 members, thank you for the opportunity to provide opposition testimony on House Bill 8.

OEA believes the framework established in House Bill 8 unnecessarily entangles state government in regulating communications and relationships between parents and educators. Government mandates on these matters interfere with the professionalism of educators and weaken the principle of local control of public schools.

Chances for student success are of course best when parents, guardians, and other family members are engaged and active in the school community. Quality interaction and involvement includes meeting with educators, volunteering for school activities and trips, participating in Parent-Teacher Associations, and more.

However, the effect of House Bill 8 would not be to build stronger parent-educator cooperation. This legislation is more likely to sow distrust between schools and parents by planting the seeds of suspicion and fostering an “us vs. them” mindset. This hostile approach is unnecessary and diverts attention from the critical challenges educators and parents face in meeting the needs of students.

Effective partnerships between schools and parents are based on trust and mutual respect. House Bill 8 threatens to undermine that trust by encouraging antagonistic processes for making allegations around vague and subjective terms. Fostering such conflict is more likely to lead to further targeting of marginalized students or populations in our schools, book bans, and censorship based on

ideology, not helping students, or addressing the real issues facing our public schools.

The PEN America Index of School Book Bans lists more than 2,500 instances of book bans across the country from June 2021 to June 2022, affecting more than 1,600 titles. The PEN America report states: “This book-banning effort is continuing as the 2022-23 school year begins, too, with at least 139 additional bans taking effect since July 2022.”

It is also a concern for OEA that House Bill 8 fundamentally disregards educator experience and expertise. Educators are dedicated to teaching and supporting all students—no matter their race, ZIP code, or background. House Bill 8 ignores their ability, in concert with parents, to make decisions based on their experience and expertise about what is best for students.

Chair Bird, this concludes my remarks. Thank you again for the opportunity to share OEA’s concerns with House Bill 8, and we appreciate the committee’s consideration of our position. I am available for any questions you or members of the committee may have.