

December 6, 2024

Honorable Members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee
Senate Building – Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215



Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and the rest of the Senate Education Committee.

The First Ring Schools are a collaborative of schools in Cuyahoga County that surround the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. We are a diverse group of districts who work together to improve public education across the county.

We are here to express our concerns and oppose SB 295. We understand the importance of a quality public education and we work daily to provide that to each of our students. We also understand that some of our districts face significant challenges in showing success as measured by passage rates on academic tests. Rather than improve schools, the state is taking yet another step to act in a punitive fashion towards districts who already face several challenges.

Past history has shown that taking a school over, or threatening punitive action is no way to drive improvement. Districts and school buildings do not strive to have their students struggle when taking achievement tests. These districts already understand they have challenges and introducing fear into the situation will do nothing but divert scarce staff time away from direct student support.

A better approach is to work with these districts and schools to see what supports can be used to improve performance. The General Assembly has recently required the Department to implement a grant program focused on assisting poor performing districts. Additionally, districts are focusing on the significant problem of increasing chronic absenteeism. Both of these initiatives could do much to address the challenges facing our struggling districts.

Lame duck is not the time to be introducing and attempting to pass this type of public policy change. Having just obtained the language last week interested parties need time to review and discuss what difficulties we've found with the proposal. In a quick review we see two instances where there needs to be work done on the language.

Under the definition in the bill, it does not matter what kind of job schools are doing or what kind of results are being obtained because there will always be a bottom 5% and 10%.

What are the additional resources to cover an external service provider or to support whichever solution the district chooses to implement?

What is the scope of services the external provider can do in directing the operation of the district or building?

These are but a few of our concerns. The experience districts experienced under academic distress commissions provides a cautious warning to these types of state mandates. We ask that the committee take the time to fully explore this bill and allow us to continue the conversation in the 136th General Assembly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wm W Wagner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

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