

OHIO SENATE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Testimony on
Academic Distress Commissions
By
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Committee Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor, and members:

I am the vice president of the Canton City School District Board of Education and its Legislative Liaison. You have heard from me regarding Academic Distress Commissions and state takeover of public school districts in the past, and were tonight not our district's graduation ceremony where we will be graduating nearly 90 percent of our senior class, I would be with you today in person.

Please know that I give this testimony as emphatically as I would in person, and I appreciate your receipt of it in as good faith as you would were I in person.

My constituents in the Canton City School District vehemently oppose any and all schemes that provide a path for the state takeover of public school districts. Period.

State takeover of public school districts:

- Is taxation without representation
- Is conflicts of interest;
- Is divisive and harmful to communities;
- Is abject failure None of the three school districts taken over by the state have seen the performance improvements promised by proponents.:
- Is discriminatory [rigged] against high poverty urban districts.

The Canton City School District Board of Education has filed a Brief of *Amicus Curiae* in support of the Youngstown City School District Board of Education in the Ohio Supreme Court.

We support H.B. 154 as reported by the House of Representatives.

We do not support in any way, shape or form, any attempt to amend that legislation to include a scheme that enshrines state takeover *de facto*.

We oppose any tinkering with H.B. 154 that brings state takeover schemes in through a back door. We oppose any scheme that approximates current academic distress commissions, operationally or conceptually.

Attempts to slip in such schemes ought to be beneath this general assembly, as it makes you look petty, vindictive, and that you are arguing a bad point.

I should not have to say this. This committee should be able to be trusted to take recommendations from education professionals and codify them as necessary.

General Assemblies past have done great damage to public education in Ohio and caused Ohio's overall education performance among the 50 states to drop precipitously over the last 20 years, and this would be a great time to take stock of that fact.

Last week a document titled: *“Ohio School Transformation Plan: An Alternative to the Academic Distress Commission”* surfaced.

Make no mistake, that draft is a state takeover plan. I have dubbed it: *“State Takeover by Prettier People with Different Names.”*

Some of you on this committee know the draft well because your names are on it.

The document was created by a narrow group of individuals, including those who were in the “private working group” behind the current H.B. 70 you now need to repeal. It is not a bi-partisan effort, and looks like it was going to be another big secret until it rolled out.

Shame on you!

Those of us who have been working on this issue for years have availed ourselves to you to do work that is honest and transparent, and brings together real stakeholders.

Did you indulge us? No.

You have been provided with principles discussed by education professionals and elected officials who represent school districts that would make sense:

1. Stopping the bleeding. Elimination of state control in Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland, and no new Academic Distress Commissions.
2. Local control of school districts – elected school boards. Period.
3. It is absolutely essential that Ohio’s school report card be reformed and that bias against poverty be engineered out. The invalidity of the report card is a serious issue at the heart of this wider problem.
4. School districts must be able to create their own paths to academic improvement.
5. The state must recognize that students in high poverty districts cost more to educate than those from more affluent backgrounds, and fund school districts accordingly.

Finally, in addition to cleaning up the mess your predecessors made with the report card, your first duty is to deal with Ohio’s still unconstitutional school funding formula.

As public school districts in Ohio, we really need you to do the right thing here, not just make special interests happy.

My invitation to work with you constructively on this still stands.

