



**Senate Education Committee
HB 166 – SC3117-7 Opponent Testimony
Gary L. Baker, II
President, Columbus Board of Education
June 13, 2019**

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor and Members of the Senate Education Committee – thank you for the opportunity to provide some thoughts today relative to SC3117-7, the proposed academic distress commission reform amendment.

As Board President of Ohio’s largest school district, I feel it is important to weigh in on this critical debate. In my opinion – an opinion also shared by my colleagues on the Columbus Board of Education and, indeed, by education colleagues and non-educators across the state – the language added to HB 70 in the 131st General Assembly has not produced the results intended upon its rather hasty passage. In fact, reports indicate that it has had quite the opposite effect, disrupting and dividing communities and creating situations within them that is antithetical to a strong school culture.

It is not my intent, however, to dwell on the past but to look to the future as to how we can rectify this current situation. Attached to this testimony is a resolution I intend to offer for consideration and adoption by the Columbus Board of Education at our meeting next Tuesday. In short, it reflects our preference for the language contained in HB 154. It also reflects and acknowledges that there may still be work to be done to secure passage. If the Senate – and eventually the Conference Committee – deems additional work needs to be done, then the following principles should guide that work:

- Any reform effort must maintain local control of buildings and districts;
- Any reform should shift its focus onto struggling schools and away from whole-district approaches;
- Any reform should have the support of families, administrators, educators, and staff – without a collaborative buy-in, it will be doomed from the start;
- Any reform must provide ample time for the creation of any turnaround plans as well as for their implementation.

Unfortunately, I feel that the amendment as proposed fails to achieve these principles. While it may delay it, state takeover still remains, and districts appear to be presented with a Hobbesian choice when it comes to engaging with a third-party improvement organization. The entire plan is still heavily district-focused. While theoretically the stakeholder engagement may create a sense of buy-in for the improvement plan, the remaining mechanics of the language continue to make the process seem less of a collaborative one and more authoritarian. Finally, many of the timelines appear untenable. I completely understand the sense of urgency with this issue because we want to make sure our students are receiving the best education possible as quickly as possible and that they are prepared for their futures; however, effective planning requires thoughtful deliberation and preparation. The

root cause analysis, the selection of an improvement organization and other planning language in the bill requires more than just a couple of months. If we are going to do this right, we need to have the appropriate amount of time to plan, consider options, and execute.

This language is not the solution to HB 70, nor do we have the luxury of time to work through the various issues therein. I would contend that given the shortened timeframe to effectuate these needed changes as quickly as possible, it is necessary to adopt an approach in the short-term and another dedicated to a long-term solution. It is critical that we get this right; we should not and cannot use the deadlines tied to the budget process to rush such a critical decision. Thus, we would offer a compromise – retain the language contained in the House-passed version in the short term but establish a long-term process to determine any additional changes that are needed. This process should operate similar to the one undertaken by Representatives Cupp and Patterson regarding the school funding formula and be composed of Ohio-based educators and administrators with experience turning around low performing schools. Through collaboration with the field, we can create a system that meets our collective goal – student success.

Members of the Committee, my colleagues, our staff, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on this and many other important issues.

Gary L. Baker, II
President
Columbus Board of Education

RESOLUTION

TO URGE REFORM OF OHIO'S ACADEMIC DISTRESS COMMISSION LAW

WHEREAS, House Bill 70 of the 131st Ohio General Assembly ("HB 70") modified the law governing academic distress commissions in Ohio, effectively replacing the authority of locally elected boards of education with a state-appointed academic distress commission and a CEO with considerable power and limited oversight; and

WHEREAS, HB 70 has largely divided communities, exacerbating the very issues they were designed to address; and

WHEREAS, the Columbus Board of Education ("the Board") firmly believes in the principle of local control; and

WHEREAS, the Board further believes in the principle that any reform approach should shift its focus onto struggling schools; and

WHEREAS, the Board further believes in the principle that for any reform effort to be successful, it must have the support of families, administrators, educators, and staff; and

WHEREAS, the Board further believes that ample time must be given for the development of any turnaround plans as well as for the implementation of those plans; and

WHEREAS, the Board further believes that the most effective way to effectuate these changes is through the adoption of language contained in the House-passed version of HB 166 and as contained in HB 154 of the 133rd General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the Board further believes that a long-term process should be established to determine any additional changes that are needed, similar to the process undertaken by Representatives Cupp and Patterson regarding the school funding formula, composed of Ohio-based educators and administrators with experience turning around low performing schools.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Columbus City Schools' Board of Education ("the Board") requests that the Ohio General Assembly act immediately to repeal existing laws governing academic distress commissions and replace said laws with language contained in the House-passed version of HB 166 and as contained in HB 154 of the 133rd General Assembly; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, if necessary during the course of the legislative process, the Board directs the Superintendent to continue to work on behalf of the District on any additional language related to reform of the current academic distress commission statutes that support the principles contained herein, including the policy actions recommended by the Ohio 8 Coalition, the First Ring Schools Collaborative, and the Mid Sized Urban Collaborative in their correspondence to members of the General Assembly dated April 3, 2019; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board directs the Superintendent to advocate for the proposed actions contained herein to the Ohio General Assembly, the Governor of the State of Ohio, the State Board of Education, and the Ohio Department of Education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board directs the Superintendent to share a copy

of this resolution and encourage their support of the resolution with the Columbus City Schools' delegation of the Ohio General Assembly, leadership of the Ohio Senate and Ohio House of Representatives, the chairs and ranking members of the appropriate Senate and House Committees, and other local officials and public education advocates.