

Proponent Testimony

DATE: September 28, 2021

TO: Members of the House Government Oversight Committee

FROM: Kirsten Hill

RE: Support for H.B. 298, Returning the State Board of Education to an all-elected voting membership

Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the Ohio House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of House Bill 298.

Also, thank you to Representative Adam Bird for the explanation on the formation and evolution of the State Board of Education's composition from 1953 to the present. The Ohio Revised Code currently requires the board to be 11 elected members plus 8 Governor-appointed members (appointees) with the Governor filling vacancies that may arise. As it turns out, at this particular point in time in 2021, the board has 10 elected members plus 9 appointees, these 9 constituting 47% of the voting membership, even more influential.

To further demonstrate influence of appointees on the State Board, let's look at the leadership of the State Board of Education. The position of board president is currently and has been held by an appointee for the last several terms. Currently, five of the seven members, on the Board's Executive Committee are appointees and four of the six chairmen of committees are appointees. Dare I say that the agenda of the current board is dominated by unaccountable members?

As stated by Representative Bird in his primary sponsor testimony, appointees "are not accountable to anyone". The voters cannot hold them accountable and control is more top-down. Regarding education, it is frequently mentioned that Ohio is a 'local control' state. With appointees on the state board, local control of education by local school district boards is diminished.

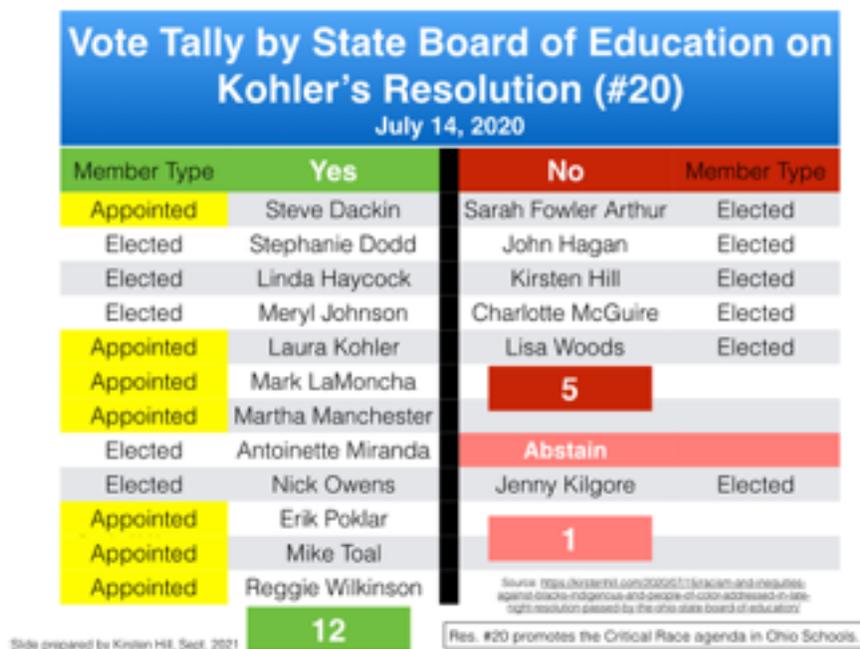
As a side note, money can also diminish local control. For example the \$6.2 billion¹ received from the federal government since early 2020 by the Ohio education system diminishes local control. This is roughly three quarters of an annual state education funding budget in Ohio. This is also incredibly influential over local control.

To work towards honoring this statement that we are a local control state, we should have only elected members on the State Board of Education, who are accountable to the voters.

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/health-education-ohio-pandemics-coronavirus-pandemic-ca9e65773a28240cf4b63fca11b03f73>

Organizationally, the State Board of Education is sandwiched between the local boards of education and the Ohio Legislature, both of which are 100% - elected bodies². Shouldn't the State Board of Education model and reflect the composition of local school district boards of education as well as reflect the Ohio Legislature?

For one example of the level of influence held by appointees currently, we can look at the vote tally on one particular member-proposed resolution, proposed by Board President Kohler, Resolution 20 "RESOLUTION TO CONDEMN RACISM AND TO ADVANCE EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR BLACK STUDENTS, INDIGENOUS STUDENTS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR"³. See vote tally in this chart.



As I finish, I would also like to thank Representative Miller, who represents District 56 where I live, for being a Primary Sponsor on this bill. I appreciate his recognition of the necessity of giving voice to the voters on issues and policies in education.

I respectfully request this committee support this bill along with the Ohio House and Ohio Senate to return the State Board of Education to an all-elected panel.

Thank you. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

² Exception to this is when vacancies are filled by appointment.

³ [education.ohio.gov/getattachment/State-Board-of-Education/Reports-and-Policies/Equity-Resolution.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US](https://www.ohio.gov/getattachment/State-Board-of-Education/Reports-and-Policies/Equity-Resolution.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US)