



**Alliance for High Quality Education
Senate Bill 178 Interested Party Testimony
Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
December 6, 2022**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today as an interested party regarding Senate Bill (SB) 178. My name is Anthony Podojil, Ph.D., and I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for High Quality Education (AHQE), a consortium of 70 high-performing school districts located throughout the State of Ohio.

Prior to joining the Alliance as its executive director, I served as superintendent for the West Geauga Local School District in Lake County for 13 years. I began my educational career as an early primary teacher and served as both a middle school and high school principal while working in five school districts ranging from rural, suburban, and urban. With me today to assist with answering your questions is Will Schwartz.

Career-technical education

On behalf of the Alliance, I would like to thank Senator Reineke for his commitment to improving Ohio's education system and his support for career-technical education. The Alliance is a proud supporter of career-technical education and, along with stakeholders, championed the inclusion of career-technical education seals in the new graduation seals system. The Alliance also helped create the current report card system in which career-technical education saw a heightened focus through the creation of the College, Career, Workforce and Military Readiness Component.

The Alliance supports the workforce development provisions of SB 178, including the expansion of career opportunity exposure to middle school students, the notification to students that career-technical education is a pathway to high school graduation, and the inclusion of education agency officials on the Governor's Executive Workforce Board, among others. Ohio is at a critical juncture where our education system and workforce needs could not be more intertwined, and we must renew our commitment to prepare students for the 21st century economy.

Transparency and public input

Our members engage frequently with members of the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Ohio Department of Education (ODE) staff, as well as the General Assembly, governor's office and other stakeholders. As such, the ability to provide feedback and have an open dialogue on administrative rules and other items under the purview of ODE and the State Board is a top priority for our members. A departure from the current open and deliberate process to instead consolidate control to one individual generates a considerable amount of concern for our members.

What mechanisms will be in place and what assurances will exist to ensure the new director and their deputies meaningfully engage with the field and stakeholders? How will they solicit, receive, and respond to feedback? The bill does require the new director to follow the Administrative Procedures Act, but no additional specifics exist. Will there continue to be a committee process by subject area? What will be the standard timeline for implementing legislative directives like cut scores for state tests, report card star ratings, or new content standards? Will there be a public forum – not just for public comment – but an opportunity to dialogue in public with stakeholders, agency leadership and staff? Will the meetings be broadcast on the Ohio Channel, despite no other state agency currently doing so?

Questions like these have been at the forefront of our members' minds these past few days, and the largely unspecific SB 178 fails to provide answers, which creates serious unease among our members.

Transfer of duties and authority

SB 178 intends to streamline the work of the renamed Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) by granting the director of DEW all of the duties of the State Board and State Superintendent, except for educator licensure, teacher evaluations, educator misconduct, and territory transfer issues, among others. That means one individual in the executive branch - rather than the sum decision of the State Board that includes elected officials and the legislature itself - will unilaterally make important decisions affecting students on issues like state tests, report cards, graduation requirements, and more.

Are we certain that narrowing the lines of input into a single point of contact will yield the best outcomes for students and schools? Will this correct the disjointed system proponents allege even while the State Board and State Superintendent will continue to exist and wield control over other key areas? What will happen if a governor or the director of DEW disagree with the decisions of the State Board or State Superintendent? And if bureaucracy is the targeted ill, how are we improving the process by further empowering bureaucrats to make educational decisions, instead of elected officials who are responsible for and accountable to their constituents?

Much discussion has centered on the State Board's recent foray into social issues outside of its statutory purview. These unnecessary distractions have bruised its status and delayed the board's important work, including the selection of a permanent state superintendent. One solution to this issue could be to restrict that board's activity on items not delegated to it or authorized by statute. That way the panel can restore itself to its intended purpose and not unnecessarily deviate from it.

Timeline

The details of the substitute bill were made public less than one week ago, and few of our superintendents have had an ample opportunity to fully digest the proposal and provide us with adequate feedback, let alone brief their own boards of education or their communities about the legislation. Therefore, we urge this committee and the General Assembly not to act swiftly on the bill this session and, instead, use caution and seek feedback from the field, who undoubtedly will be most affected by this proposal.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.