



OHIO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NETWORK

A Network of Center for Christian Virtue

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is Troy McIntosh and I serve as Executive Director of the Ohio Christian Education Network. Prior to that I served as a school administrator for 24 years in central Ohio, including eight at the superintendent level. I represent 150 member schools in our network and I stand in support of HB12 that would reform the functions and responsibilities of the State BOE and the Department of Education. The following reasons form the basis of our support.

1. **The structure of the board, and an ongoing level of dysfunction within the board, have combined to create an inefficient and too often unresponsive department.** While there are examples of excellent work being done in the department – I will note the Office of Educational Options and Collen Grady as an exception - the governance structure causes inherent barriers to operations and efficiency that even the best of its staff cannot overcome. This has manifested itself most recently in the following ways:
 - a. A clunky rollout of the Afterschool Child Enrichment program for both student participants and vendors that resulted in far fewer participants than were provided for and expected.
 - b. Delays in EdChoice Scholarship processing that has resulted in some schools going months into the year before receiving funding for scholarship recipients.
 - c. Student transportation issues across the state, including districts attempting to reduce or eliminate private school transportation in manners not in accordance with the law. I can give at least two examples in which I have had to intervene on behalf of member schools.
 - d. Mismanagement of the single constitutionally appointed task of hiring a permanent superintendent.
 - e. Its inability to provide clear direction on basic questions related to children, such as “what is a boy?”, “what is a girl?” These are not political questions extraneous to its work. It is a necessary response to political pressure stemming from a radical interpretation of Title IX.

The fact is that the department sorely lacks leadership, direction, and oversight that even the best interim superintendent cannot provide. In fact, I will argue that even the best permanent superintendent will have difficulty providing this given the structure of the department.



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2. **The bill would align the structure of the Department of Education to the style of nearly every other executive department**, in which the elected governor provides executive leadership, sometimes with assistance from a board, such as the state nursing or dental boards, with limited and specific duties related to licensure and professional conduct. Placing policy making responsibility in a cabinet-level office will streamline decision making, allowing it to be more nimble and responsive to problems and opportunities rather than the gridlock that comes from having the form a majority, let alone a consensus, from 19 different members. The board is too large to be an effective decision-making body. Of the top 20 performing states, only Pennsylvania has a board as large as Ohio's. The other 19 high performing states have boards ranging from 7 to 15 members. Half of the top 20 performing states have governance models in which the governor appoints those who control state education executive functions – either appointing both the board and the head or the head alone with no board in existence. There is a reason this model works – it aligns policy and provides direct leadership

3. **While opponents of the bill will claim that this is reducing the democratic representation that an elected board provides, the current structure actually serves as an unnecessary level of bureaucracy that impedes the democratic function of the executive branch.** While state board members are elected, very few Ohioans could even name a single board member, including the member elected to represent their own district. More problematic is that Ohio voters often know little about the candidates that are on the ballot. This lack of familiarity leads to elections that can be, and are, heavily influenced by money because the election will too often come down to name recognition rather than any qualifications or policy positions of the candidates. In fact, we saw last November how influential money can be in school board elections.

Further, the current structure creates a third, and unnecessary, level of bureaucracy that bogs down the system. This layer of elected bureaucracy does not increase representation. Bureaucracy always decreases democratic representation. If electing more officials was the answer to better representation, then why not 50 more elected officials? Or 100 more? The answer is obvious; because it doesn't increase representation in the same way that these 11 elected positions does not increase representation in a manner superior to an elected governor. There is little about the current process that results in true democratic representation by the board. Rather, the executive functions of the board should be placed directly under the democratically elected chief executive, whose policy positions are well-known and far more representative of the citizens of the state. In fact, the constitutional provision establishing the board specifically gives the General Assembly the authority to do this.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to move the bill onto the House floor for a vote of the full body.