



The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

Senate Bill 1: Interested Party Testimony
Senate Education Committee
Tuesday, February 21, 2023

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Davis. I am a staff member in the Government Relations department for the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of the 120,000 members of OEA, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 1.

OEA is an interested party on SB 1. As I will outline in my testimony, OEA has concerns about the substance of this proposal and its potential impacts. We appreciate that the Chair and the bill's sponsor have taken the time to meet with stakeholder groups about their thoughts on the bill. We also appreciate a more deliberate approach being taken with this bill as compared to what can occur during the waning days of lame duck session.

Collaboration should serve as a guiding principle as you consider this bill. Education, by its very nature, is collaborative. Educating a student takes collaboration between the teachers in the building, administration, education support professionals and families. On another level, Ohio does not have one statewide education system but hundreds of school districts, vocational schools, ESCs, charter schools, and private schools. In the spirit of that collaboration, changes that impact education should be well vetted and well understood. SB 1 proposes a significant shift in the way education is overseen and supported in Ohio. The concerns of stakeholders should be heard and addressed. As this committee hears concerns and suggestions about how to improve the bill, I hope you will engage with those ideas. Put another way, we'd like to feel that this change is being done with us, not being done to us.

OEA believes that it is worth taking a hard look at how the State Board of Education and the Ohio Department of Education function and what can be improved. However, it is also important to note some positives about the current system. The members of the State Board, whether elected or appointed, give of themselves to serve Ohio's students. The meetings and deliberations of the State Board of Education are public. The public has the opportunity for input on rule making and other decisions. The Department of Education meets regularly with stakeholder groups and has sought out input on issues such as professional development, ESSA applications, strategic planning, and more.

As an advocate for our members, OEA wants to ensure that the voices of educators are heard, valued, and have a meaningful impact on education policy. Educators are experts on their subject areas, the needs of students, and what works and doesn't work in the classroom. Several of the suggested changes listed below are aimed at maintaining and strengthening the voice of our members.



Suggested Changes:

Leave rule making authority with the State Board of Education. The process with the Board offers open hearings, a public forum for member input and greater transparency.

Leave the development of academic content standards and model curriculum with the State Board of Education. Educators are centrally involved in the development of content standards under the current process. Again, the public nature of the body allows for public input and transparency. When it comes to content standards, educators should play a key role. We want to avoid a cabinet director making unilateral decisions with limited input from the public or a system where politics dictate who does or does not have access.

Build stakeholder group representation (including OEA) through transition and beyond. In order to ensure continued collaboration, include in the language an advisory group of key stakeholder organizations in the language. This may help to avoid unintended consequences, understand new roles, and address service gaps.

Remove provisions that lift oversight and prohibit further rules regarding home education. Recent news stories about racist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi, and homophobic lessons being shared through a homeschooling network should serve as a cautionary tale. It would be a mistake to turn a blind eye to this situation and lift the scant oversight that exists in this area.

Consider an all-elected State Board of Education. If most of the powers and duties of the State Board of Education are transferred to a new department in the Governor's office, it may make sense to eliminate gubernatorial appointments to the Board and make it an all-elected body.

In conclusion, speaking on behalf of OEA members across the state, we want what is best for students. Our students, educators, and schools face daunting challenges. We know that our school districts need support. We need adequate and equitable funding; strategies to attract and retain quality educators; resources to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. Regardless of the powers and duties of the State Board of Education, how the Department of Education is organized, or whatever name it goes by, educators must have a seat at the table. We want educators and other stakeholders to have input and a meaningful voice in decision making. That is how we'll get the best results for the students we serve.

Chair Brenner, thank you for the opportunity to testify. OEA stands ready to participate in any discussion about how we can improve education for Ohio's students. I am happy to answer questions from the committee.