



**House Economic and Workforce Development Committee  
SB 1 Testimony  
Ohio School Boards Association**

**April 25, 2023**

Chair Swearingen, Vice Chair Santucci, Ranking Member Upchurch and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development committee. My name is Nicole Piscitani, lobbyist for the Ohio School Boards Association. The Ohio School Boards Association represents public school district boards of education from around the state. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of our members.

Proponents have testified about the importance of career technical education. We could not agree more with them about the need to highlight the great things occurring at career tech centers, the opportunities they provide for students and the partnerships shared with local employers to help fill Ohio's workforce needs. Career technical education is an amazing opportunity for students and provides a pathway for lifelong success both for students and the state.

We support the requirement for the department to develop and provide materials for seventh and eighth graders about career opportunities. The materials will also share information on how a career-technical education can help students satisfy high school graduation requirements. Additionally, we support the requirement that the department identify in-demand jobs and post that list on its website.

While we support the elevation of career technical education and opportunities for students, we have significant concerns about the restructuring of the roles of the State Board of Education and the superintendent of public instruction included in the bill.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is responsible for carrying out the public education policy changes and laws passed every year by the Ohio General Assembly. In recent years, there have been constant, significant changes to Ohio's education public policy, presenting significant implementation challenges for ODE staff and our school districts. ODE's implementation of so many changes can admittedly result in frustration by our members. However, our experience in working with department staff to resolve issues and questions from the field is typically very positive.

We believe that the goals of the legislation as stated in previous testimony can be accomplished without engaging in drastic restructuring. We offer the following suggested changes with the

intent of the sponsor and proponents in mind and would be happy to meet outside of this hearing to discuss them further.

### **Restructuring**

We oppose the creation of a new agency and the reduction in the role and significance of the State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction. However, **we would support the renaming of the department and the creation of two separate divisions, within the current Department of Education**, the Division of Primary and Secondary Education and the Division of Career-Technical Education, each with a separate deputy director who will serve on the Governor's Executive Workforce Board. We believe that this will help to highlight the importance and value of career-technical education and strengthen partnerships with Ohio's employers.

### **State Board of Education**

SB 1 would undermine the role and authority of the elected members of the State Board of Education. By stripping it of all but its regulatory role, the board would no longer be acting in any significant way on behalf of the citizens they represent. At the core of our existence is the belief that education in Ohio will be at its best when the interests of the people are served through publicly elected boards and the State Board of Education is no different. **SB 1 should be amended to have a fully elected State Board of Education.**

The current state board policymaking process acts in the open with many observers and interested parties weighing in on the decisions before the board. In addition to our association, over the years, we have seen parents, school leaders, educators and the public take advantage of the public nature of these deliberations. OSBA appreciates that SB 1 has been amended to include a stakeholder outreach process that will allow input during the rulemaking process. However, OSBA is still concerned that decisions about important topics such as setting the state's learning standards, graduation requirements for students and school district report cards would be removed from State Board's responsibilities, thus diminishing the voice of Ohio citizens who voted to elect their State Board member. **We request that all of the changes in the role of the State Board of Education be removed from the bill to allow for the continuation of open, transparent policymaking that exists today.**

We have also heard concerns from witnesses about the state board's recent consideration of resolutions that are outside the scope of their role and purpose. To alleviate these concerns, **we suggest that the committee consider drafting language that would restrict the board's ability to entertain and discuss items outside of their purview.**

### **Superintendent of Public Instruction**

Previous witnesses have spoken about frequent turnover in the state superintendent's position and the lack of long-term vision and planning that this causes. If one looks to the history of that position, they will see that the impetus of the frequent turnover coincides with the placement of appointed members on the board. As a governor came into office, he would place his appointees on the state board and a change in superintendent would occur shortly thereafter.

This has created a system with frequent changes in leadership, direction and vision, these issues that would likely be exacerbated by the bill. The bill continues to tie education leadership to the changes in the governor's office just in a different way. **While the current system is subject to fluctuations in leadership, we believe the current structure allows for more continuity than the proposed governance structure in SB 1.**

We believe that our suggestions are a viable way to answer the current challenges with the system posed by the sponsor and witnesses. Creating a new agency with a single director accountable to the governor will not ensure that the stated goals for SB 1 will be achieved. We urge you to revise SB 1 to include the suggested changes.

Thank you for considering our testimony. I will be happy to address any questions you might have.