

Testimony of G. Robert Bowers Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction Emeritus, 1970-1989

Before the Ohio House Economic and Work Force Development Committee
In opposition to Senate Bill 1

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

I am G. Robert Bowers. I had the pleasure of being an assistant superintendent of public instruction in the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) from 1970 to 1989. My father, the late Harold J. Bowers, served in the ODE from 1936 until 1970—20 years under a director of education and 14 years under the superintendent of public instruction. His admonition to me was “never let it go back to a directorship.” That is only one of the reasons I am here today speaking against House Bill 12.

The issues or problems with the current State Board of Education are the direct result of the General Assembly in the mid-90’s changing the State Board from an all elected, non-partisan board to a hybrid consisting of 11 elected members and eight appointees of the governor. This was just like mixing oil and water and expecting a solution to appear. FALSE! It has been catastrophic and can be easily corrected by returning the State Board to an all elected non-partisan board from Ohio’s 15 congressional districts.

Tremendous educational progress was made under the all elected State Board. Over 1100 school districts were reduced to just over 600. All students had access to at least 20 different vocational (now career) opportunities through either their home school district or a joint vocational high school. These career opportunities were kept current by each having an advisory committee of employers in that particular area. As superintendent of the Plain Local School District in Stark County from 1962-1970, I am proud to say we had 40% of our juniors and seniors enrolled in vocational education.

The current buzz words of “career and technical education” have been spawned by Intel and other high tech companies coming to Ohio. The career education programs in our school districts and joint vocational schools can and will meet relevant employment demand if appropriately funded.

Public education in Ohio is not like a little speed boat that can turn on a dime. Rather it is like an ocean liner with over 1,750,000 pupils on board together with thousands of teachers, administrators and other school employees. It is in dire need of dynamic, sustained leadership from the state board and superintendent of public instruction. In the first 30 years of the state board there were only three state superintendents. Since the revised state board has been operating for 28 years, there have been seven superintendents and now one who was an “interim” has resigned.

It is time to stop this dilemma and return the state board to one that is elected from each of the congressional districts so that they may engage a state superintendent who may sustain vigorous, courageous leadership over a long period of time, not just three or four years.

The General Assembly will always be the BIG BOARD OF EDUCATION.

Thank you!

Respectfully submitted,

G. Robert Bowers Ed.D.

Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction Emeritus (1970-1989)