

My name is Meryl Johnson. I was elected to the State Board of Education in 2016 shortly after retiring from teaching for forty years in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. I was re-elected in 2020 with 177,798 votes. I'm here to oppose House Bill 12 which would silence the voices of almost 200,000 voters who made me their choice.

I recently heard a legislator say that "poverty doesn't matter" when it comes to education. Low-income districts are constantly criticized for low test scores, when it has become obvious, through many charts and articles shared by the media, that standardized tests measure wealth, not intelligence.

Before condemning our school districts where poor families live, whether urban, rural, or suburban, why not explore the root cause of the low test scores, as Cleveland City Councilman Richard Starr suggested in his testimony opposing SB1.

Children born to poor mothers are less likely to receive regular medical care. They are less likely to see a dentist. They are less likely to have educated parents. They are less likely to be read to each day by a parent or guardian. They are less likely to have their own bedroom and a quiet place to study. They are less likely to hear a large and complex vocabulary at home, as compared with children in higher income families. An amazing piece of research developed by Betty Hart and Todd Risley suggests that children up to age 4 from a lower socioeconomic status heard 30 million fewer words than children from a higher socioeconomic status. Children born to poor parents are less likely to get three nutritious meals every day. They are less likely to live in stable, lead-free housing. Research has made it clear that lead poisoning can cause cognitive deficiencies. They are less likely to live in a safe neighborhood. They are less likely to participate in organized activities after school, such as sports, dramatics, art or dance or music classes. Those activities help to heal the traumatized brain brought on by poverty, thus making it easier for self-regulation and critical thinking. They are less likely to take a family vacation or go to summer camp. Hiram House Camp is where I spent two weeks every summer from the age of eight to thirteen. I was involved in a variety of learning experiences. I rode horses and learned the proper way to fold a flag and practiced archery. I wonder how many of my friends at that time who didn't have that experience would recognize the word "archery" on a standardized test.

Some information came from *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools* by Diane Ravitch

Here's a direct quote from Diane Ravitch: "When one considers the difference in life circumstances of children who are poor and children who are not poor, it is inconceivable how any responsible person could claim that poverty doesn't matter or that poverty is an 'excuse'."

The burdens of poverty and its impact on learning cannot be undone by placing our education system in the hands of the governor. That's just plain disrespectful to the families of the state, to put something as precious as their children's education in the hands of someone who didn't even ask for it, so I read. As serious as the issues are in the classrooms, especially in the area of literacy, your decision to toss K to 12 education into the hands of the governor and kick dirt in the face of local control, is just irresponsible.

If you were really looking for a solution to Ohio's poor rating in education (number 31 I read in Education Week) you would first have to accept that our teachers are professionals who deserve the support, including resources, to do their job.

In Article VI, Section 2 of the Ohio Constitution, it says: “The General Assembly will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state.” The magic words are “thorough and efficient.” The original school funding law suit, *DeRolph vs. State of Ohio*, was filed in 1991. The Ohio Supreme Court ruled four times that Ohio’s school funding system is unconstitutional because of an over reliance on property taxes. It still is. So, why should I trust the governor and general assembly to do the right thing when it comes to Ohio’s students. The desire by some of our legislators to dismantle public education through universal vouchers is not a secret. Again I ask, why should I trust that HB 12 would improve our public schools?

All of our students deserve to be successful, not just some. We haven’t see a plan to make that happen. The State Board of Education developed an excellent strategic plan called *Each Child Our Future*. If members of the general assembly would read it and work with the State Board to implement some of the evidence-based ideas, we would see improvements in our school districts. Let’s try it.