



Chair Adam Bird, Vice-chair Sarah Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Phil Robinson, and Members of the Ohio House Primary & Secondary Education Committee:

Public Education Partners (PEP) strongly opposes House Bill 12, the takeover of the State School Board and the Ohio Department of Education, and views it as an unconstitutional policy that is designed to take away the rights of Ohio voters pertaining to education issues.

In 2015, the Ohio Legislature passed another state takeover law called HB 70 without careful consideration and expert guidance from public education stakeholders. That failed state takeover plan was a piece of ideological legislation that passed in the middle of the night, and now many of the same legislators are rushing to pass a state takeover of the State School Board.

The chair of the Ohio Senate Education Committee vehemently supports the takeover of the State School Board and the Ohio Department of Education, citing low test scores from districts like East Cleveland, even though East Cleveland has been controlled for several years by the state through a school takeover academic distress commission under HB 70.

The sponsor of the Senate's companion bill (SB 1) blames the Ohio Department of Education for the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report showing that in Ohio, "our fourth graders and eighth graders have fallen drastically behind in both reading and math." That is not true. The 2022 NAEP was administered January through mid-March 2022 to approximately 9,700 Ohio students, and [Ohio students scored above the national public-school average](#) in both fourth-grade and eighth-grade mathematics and not significantly different than the national average in reading. This data shows strength and resilience within the Ohio Department of Education and our school districts across the state, and it highlights ways in which both ODE and public schools have positively impacted children and families- even during a pandemic.

State takeovers are often found to be undemocratic and unaccountable, and therefore unacceptable. We see this state takeover as undemocratic, because it will take power away from 11 publicly elected school board members and will negate the votes of over 200,000 Ohio citizens. This takeover will give unaccountable bureaucrats unlimited control of our schools. A state takeover of the school board through HB 12 is unacceptable, because giving most of the State BOE duties to the governor's office will guarantee that political interests will be served at the expense of Ohio school children and their parents.

Currently, decisions made by members of the State Board of Education are crucial to every Ohioan. Board members create academic standards and definitions, approve curriculum, and establish test benchmarks. The Board sets the policy direction for public schools and establishes policies concerning charter schools, vouchers, professional development, educational licenses, and more. The state school board is focused on primary and secondary education and is easily accessible to the citizens of our great state.

Because of the State Board's influence, it's very important to have members who are true advocates for public education. Our elected state school board members serve the will of their constituents- they are not selected to serve at the pleasure of the Governor's political party, which isn't always friendly to public education. The State Board of Education is a non-partisan organization, but the decisions now made by the state board under the current duties of that office would be guided by partisan political power over K-12 education.

In 1953, Ohio voters passed an amendment to the Ohio Constitution that established an all-elected state board of education and a superintendent of public instruction to be appointed by that board, which sought to separate the Department of Education from the governor's office.

House Bill 12 proposes to rename the Ohio Department of Education as the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) and to move many of the roles of the State BOE to a cabinet-level position within the governor's office. The passage of SB 1 would put the governor, as well as cabinet members appointed by political favor, in charge of education policy in the state.

Whatever happened to the legislative oath of office solemnly swearing to support the Ohio Constitution?

The PEP Board has many concerns about the bill's aims, the impact of the education overhaul on federal programs, and how the department should balance education and career tech.

Please REJECT the UNCONSTITUTIONAL takeover of ODE and the State School Board of Ohio known as House Bill 12.

Thank you for your service!

Jeanne Melvin and the  
Board of Public Education Partners