

April 17, 2023

Chairman Bird and Vice-Chairman Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

I write in opposition to HB12. I write as an individual, although for identification purposes only I am a professor of Educational Policy at the Ohio State University. For brevity, I focus on two issues of this broad-ranging legislation: the shift of functions from the elected State Board of Education to a 'Department of Education and Workforce,' and the vocationalization of the school system implicit in that move.

There is no reason to think that centralizing control or emphasizing work preparation will reduce improve education in Ohio. There is no logic behind the idea that legislators, who deal with a huge range of issues, will be more responsive to the public on school issues than an elected state school board. I have concerns about the current SBOE, but a better response would be to improve the democratic scope of its operations, for example, by using digital technologies to better advertise and alert constituents of meetings and issues, using online message boards or software to enable the public to annotate or comment on proposed regulations or rules, livestreaming meetings in ways that allow the public to participate by asking questions (e.g., in chatboxes), and so on.¹

The creation of a "Department of Education and Workforce (DEW)" with control over academic standards, model curricula, and assessment and reporting structures (among other things) is even more problematic.

Career and technical education programs *could* be pursued on a European model, as a collaboration between schools, industry, and strong unions. They *could* be structured to incorporate a strong curriculum grounded in the social sciences, humanities, and arts as well as technical areas. They *could* be devised to help students analyze the political and economic processes reshaping occupational structures and work systems. These would be essential parts of the curriculum if we wanted to prepare students for the coming era of radical disruption in economic systems, occupational structures, production technologies, worker rights, and global logistics. As one vocational education theorist put it, besides teaching things like computer skills, we need to "educate young workers so that they have multiple skills and bodies of knowledge to draw on, so that they are able to analyze and act upon opportunities to affect the direction of their employment, and so that they can strive to create meaning in their working lives."²

But instead of that, HB12 focuses instead on narrow job preparation, tied to analyses of current "in-demand jobs" to be defined by as-yet unknown methods and surveys of employers (R.C. 6301.11, 6301.111, and 6301.112.) It mandates that students be oriented towards these areas as early as 7th grade.(R.C. 3313.6020(D)(3). Aside from the problems that job opportunities may have changed by the time 7th graders graduate from high school, tying schooling to particular in-demand occupations rather than providing students with a broader and more adaptable education is a recipe for an ignorant, low-wage work force. Look at the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates of occupational job growth nationally.³ The five occupations expected to add the most jobs are:

¹ These and other ideas are discussed in Young, M. D., VanGronigen, B. A., Rodriguez, K., Tmimi, S., & McCrory, A. (2021). Do State Boards of Education Offer an Avenue for Public Voice? *Urban Education*, 56(4), 552–580.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920953887>

² Rose, M. (2017). Rereading "Vocational Education and the New World of Work." National Education Policy Center.
<https://nepc.colorado.edu/blog/rereading-vocational>

³ <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/most-new-jobs.htm>

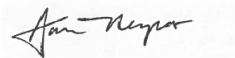
Home Health and Personal Care Aides (924,000)	(\$29,000)
Restaurant Cooks (460,000)	(\$30,000)
Software Developers (371,000)	(\$127,630)
Fast Food and Counter Workers (243,000)	(\$25,000)
General and Operations Manager (210,000)	(\$98,000)

Three of these, accounting for the vast majority of new jobs, on average pay less than the living wage for a single person in Franklin County.⁴ The particular occupational profile in Ohio may be different, but it is implausible to think it's much brighter. Would the goal in such a scenario be to route students into these low-paying but 'high demand' jobs? Would it be to train everyone to be a software engineer – which will not increase the number of jobs in that area. Or will this emphasis simply give large employers disproportionate influence over the school system?

We *do* need to help students acquire skills that prepare them for work, but more importantly we need to provide them with the analytic skills to understand how occupations have become precarious and underpaid, the math skills to understand the economic system shaping their life chances, the artistic and literary skills that could help them imagine alternative ways of living and working, and the language and communicative skills to effectively articulate their perspectives and organize with others to change the existing system. HB12 does nothing to promote these needed skills and indeed pushes the school system in the opposite direction. The Department of Education does need to change, but the kind of vocationalization proposed it is precisely the wrong way to go.

Chairman, thank you for your time. I welcome any questions from the committee.

Sincerely,



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⁴ MIT Living Wage Calculator - <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/39049>