

Testimony in opposition to SB1—the takeover of the State Board of Education by the Governor’s Office bill—by Jeanne Melvin, President of Public Education Partners (PEP)

Jeanne Melvin’s SB1 opposition testimony stresses some points not made by other opponents of SB1. Her reference to the HB70 state take-over of three Ohio school districts is compelling as an argument against the transfer of State Board functions to the Governor’s office.

To Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair O’Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee:

Public Education Partners (PEP) strongly opposes the takeover of the State School Board and the Ohio Department of Education and views it as a policy that, by design, will 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.

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 SB 1 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. Much like this committee, the state school board is focused on primary and secondary education in 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.

Senate Bill 1 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.

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

This bill's sponsor 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 simply 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.

Similar to nationwide results during the global pandemic, Ohio 2022 NAEP student performance did decline compared to 2019, but scores were never below the national average. 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.

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 do not ignore the will of the people by denying Ohioans the accountability and oversight of education issues guaranteed by the power of the vote.

Please REJECT the takeover of ODE and the State School Board of Ohio.

Thank you for your service!

Jeanne Melvin and the
Board of Public Education Partners