

The State Budget proposal currently under consideration in the Senate is full of provisions that are designed to harm school districts, such as the state-forced closure of some buildings and forced-sale at below market value.

The attached [Statehouse News story](#) by Jo Ingles provides the details of such nefarious provisions and a response by Jeff Talbert, Superintendent of Canton City schools. The Governor defends the proposal saying that some school districts are holding on to some buildings to eliminate competition. The bond issues that citizens passed to build school buildings understood that the funds were for the traditional public school buildings--not for charter schools or any other private or privately operated school.

Public schools could be forced to close some buildings, sell them cheaply to charter schools

The Statehouse News Bureau | By [Jo Ingles](#)

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The state's largest school districts are raising concern over a provision in the proposed state budget that would allow the state to force closure of some public school buildings, then force those districts to sell those properties to charter or private schools at below market value.

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine's proposed budget is about 600 pages long and the Ohio House-passed budget is longer. There's a provision tucked in both that would allow the state to force closure of some public school buildings, then force those districts to sell those properties to charter or private schools at below market value.

Representatives of Ohio's eight largest school districts call it an overreach, and they are fighting back.

Jeff Talbert, superintendent of the Canton City School District, said schools are already forced to offer properties to charter schools at market value first when buildings are closed. And he said that's ok. But he's not ok with this change, explaining it would mean the state could force closure of a building that is under 60% of its capacity.

"We would have to evict kids out of those buildings and place them elsewhere so that organizations from outside our community would be able to come in and purchase those schools for less than what we paid for them and less than what we have invested in them," Talbert said.

Talbert said the current law already requires districts to offer buildings they close for sale to charter schools first at market value. But this is different. Talbert said it allows the state to force the closure of buildings and force the district to sell them below market value. He called it a bad deal for taxpayers in Canton who recently approved bond levies to build smaller, neighborhood schools.

"They want smaller, neighborhood schools that the kids can stay there from K through 6th grade, and they did that by increasing their taxes, and we are building those buildings. But if those buildings come up a little shy in enrollment, we are going to have to give those buildings away. It just doesn't seem right to me, and I know it doesn't seem right to our community," Talbert said.

Talbert said there are some larger buildings that are currently under the stated capacity but serve specific purposes. He said some roomier accommodations are needed for students who have special physical or behavioral needs.

"That space is needed for all of the programming that is in the building. Some of those classes that maybe have 12 kids in them use two to three classrooms worth of space. But if you look at the architectural drawings, you would say well no, each one of those classrooms can hold 30 kids and you have 12 kids in three, that building is under capacity," Talbert said.

Talbert said some of the schools that are under capacity house special career-tech style programs that require space for a lot of equipment. And he said there are no allowances for that in this provision.

Gov. DeWine says there's a reason for this

But Governor DeWine sees this plan differently. He said the provision in the budget is meant to solve a problem with the current law.

"The problem is that the law for some time has said that if a district is not using a building that it needs to be sold. And that way a charter school, another school, a private school, would be able to buy that. That's what the law is. There's been some practical problems, frankly, serious allegations that some of these schools are literally holding on to this property for no other reason than to stop them, some competition. So that's what the issue is," DeWine said.

Talbert rejected that. He said that as buildings in his district become available, the district will sell those buildings, at market price, to charter or private schools as current law demands. But he said this new provision isn't fair to local taxpayers and adds that it gives charter and private schools, even those owned by national companies, a great deal.

"They get a building for below market value to make some money and take the benefit of those dollars and not invest them back into the community," Talbert said.

DeWine said the key is to make sure this provision is written in a way that addresses the problem. Talbert said he and other large school districts will be working to ensure the language is removed or changed to be fair to students and local taxpayers.