

Enemies of the public common school system, both at the federal and state level, continue to propose strategies that chip away at the foundation of the public system.

The Ohio Department and Education and Workforce Development is considering a waiver application to the US Department of Education stating that schools with low performance over 3-years face school closure, conversion to a charter school, merger with a charter school operator, and reopening under a private flavored management group with authority to essentially privatize the operation. The level of affluence in a school district determines the test scores. Poverty-stricken school districts have low test scores. Changing the governance structure will not improve even the perceived success of a school district. Public services that help poverty students become prepared for schooling are essential.

These knuckleheaded privatization schemes proposed by clever public school privatizers are bent on accelerating the demise of the public common school system. The head of the U.S. Department of Education has been given the assignment of phasing out the U.S. Department of Education and privatizing public education.

Pertinent details are included in a July 13 [Cleveland.com](#) article by Laura Hancock.

Time for the public school community and advocates to openly challenge the public school haters. Local community leaders who don't want the state and federal political bureaucratic toadies to take over their public common school need to lead the opposition.

[Educators say Ohio school waiver to close or convert buildings to charters bypasses public input](#)

Story by Laura Hancock, [cleveland.com](#)

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - Critics of a plan that would allow Ohio to close low-performing schools or convert them to charter schools say it is a monumental policy change that should be debated before the Ohio General Assembly and not quietly proposed in a federal waiver request.

In addition, critics objected that local school districts would be deprived of a say in how to address improvement at underperforming schools.

About 50 people and organizations commented on the plan — a proposed waiver the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce plans to submit to U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon that would exempt the state from certain requirements of the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), the nation's main K-12 education law that was previously called No Child Left Behind.

“Historically, waiver requests have primarily reflected technical or administrative adjustments made in response to statutory changes enacted by the legislature,” Rep. Sean Brennon, a Parma Democrat who is a retired teacher, wrote in his comments. “This proposal departs from

that longstanding practice by creating substantial new policy mechanisms affecting local school governance, instructional autonomy, and state authority without legislative debate or approval.”

DEW is still reviewing the feedback and has not yet submitted the waiver application to McMahon, DEW spokeswoman Lacey Snoke said.

Under the draft, schools with low performance over three years face [one or more of 16 interventions](#). These include school closure, conversion to a charter school, merger with a charter school operator, and reopening under a new management team with the authority to replace staff and programs.

“This proposal represents a significant policy shift absent action by the General Assembly,” Jennifer Hogue of the Ohio School Boards Association wrote in her comments.

Hogue noted in her comments that school closure and charter school takeover provisions are similar to those in [Senate Bill 127](#). But after testimony in opposition, the Senate Education Committee removed them from the legislation in early May.

“Attempting to codify via a federal waiver what failed to pass through the legislative process avoids the public scrutiny and stakeholder input necessary for sound educational policy,” wrote Ohio Federation of Teachers President Melissa Cropper,

Potential mergers and closures will disrupt education for thousands of families and provide a disincentive for teachers to work in challenging schools, which already struggle to fill positions, Cropper wrote.

Brennan argued that locally elected school boards deserve a voice when a low-performing school is being restructured, an opinion shared by Mark Knapp, superintendent of the Wheelersburg Local School District in Scioto County.

“These proposals remove local school control decisions from their communities and in my opinion are poor public policy,” Knapp wrote.

Most of the comments were critical of aspects of the draft waiver. Some supported restructuring low-performing schools but wanted local control over it.

Jamie Shields, an assistant superintendent in Chesapeake Union Exempted Village School District in Lawrence County, argued that before a charter school takes over, local schools should have more power over individual employees who are protected by unions.

“I would also love the opportunity to have an expert visit our district and give us (a) recommendation that they have seen work in similar districts, before we fall into a designated status that causes serious repercussions,” she wrote. “Currently it is very difficult to get rid of ineffective educators. Perhaps pushing for legislation that supersedes union contracts and allows districts to more easily replace ineffective educators would help.”

Poverty funding

Decades of research have shown that the most common indicator of student success is family economic background. [For Ohio buildings with high concentrations of students in poverty](#), the federal government generally provides extra funding for officials to spend on targeted student

assistance. The funds are called Title I, after the section of federal law where the money comes from.

Ohio wants to waive the percentage-poverty thresholds for Title I funding to allow districts to serve more buildings.

“Ohio’s proposal would allow districts to provide Title I services to any school attendance area that is up to 10% below the district poverty average,” the draft waiver states. “This would result in more schools being eligible to receive Title I services and more students receiving services.”

Commenters expressed concerns that could hurt schools that most need the aid.

Nicholas Munyan-Penney of education equity advocate EdTrust, writing on behalf of several state and national organizations, such as the Honesty for Ohio Education [coalition](#), wrote “it’s important to ensure that flexibility does not reduce access to services for the students these programs are designed to support. We are concerned that expanding the schools eligible to receive Title I-A funds could reduce funding for schools with the highest proportion of students from low-income families, contrary to the intent of federal law.”

Rachel Chilton, executive director for the Ohio School Psychologists Association, wrote that if the state chooses to go down this path, there must be strong protections and parent resources for the schools losing money.

“Without such safeguards, schools serving high-poverty communities risk losing access to the mental health personnel and whole-child supports that are foundational to student well-being,” she said.

[Whole child supports](#) are matters such as safety, and physical and mental health that are considered crucial to student success.

“In your Waiver Request, you stated that you want to be able to waive the poverty requirement for Title 1 funds so more students can get help. This will further widen the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots,’” wrote a commenter named Renee Lee. “This will allow wealthier school districts to receive additional funds that can offer their students even more privileges while poorer districts struggle to maintain and acquire the basics.”

The Ohio Education Association believes the funding waiver runs counter to what Congress intended, wrote Nicholas Gurich of OEA.

“In the waiver request, ODEW clearly stated a desire to align itself with the priorities of the Trump administration,” he wrote, adding that this desire “does not explain how the granting of the proposed waiver would advance student academic achievement.”

English learners

The waiver calls for more flexibility in the use of a category of federal funds for English learners for academic supports (which include tutoring, language instruction programs, and technology,) teacher professional development, and parent engagement, among other changes.

“The allocation amount for some (local school boards and charter school boards) may be too small to be effectively used for all three parts,” the waiver states. “Therefore, Ohio requests a

waiver so (local boards) may use Title III funding across any combination of the three allowable areas as determined by local needs.”

This led to almost 20 comments from parents, teachers, education professors and administrators that appeared to have drawn from similar language of an advocacy organization. They noted that Ohio has about 80,000 students learning English – a number that has doubled in the last two decades.

“While the Department frames these requests as ‘strategic flexibility’ to reduce ‘bureaucracy,’ my professional experience, and the evidence within these documents, suggests that these changes will systematically dismantle essential guardrails that ensure English Learners receive the specialized resources they are federally entitled to,” wrote Rachel Gonzalez, a Berea City School District educator. “I do not believe that (local boards) will prioritize the complex needs of EL students through a ‘good faith’ initiative alone when the statutory requirements to do so are removed.”

Education Service Centers

ESCs are regional entities that provide academic, administrative and business services to local districts. Ohio’s draft waiver states that ESCs are trained in helping districts select high-quality textbooks, workbooks and other instructional materials. In many regions, ESCs provide teacher professional development, special education, and could be asked to help make changes to low-performing schools, the waiver states.

Otherwise, the waiver is largely silent on the role of ESCs as the state seeks to impose more control over low-performing schools and changing how funding streams are used. Several regional ESC leaders wrote that they could perform a larger role in the waiver, if it’s approved, such as helping revise district spending plans over the new federal funds flexibility, help low-performing school districts analyze data and implement interventions in reading, math, attendance and other areas.

“Flexibility cannot become a vehicle for diluting supports for the students who need them most. ESCs and (regional state support teams for schools) should be expressly charged with monitoring equity-related outcomes within their service region,” said Shelly Vaughn, superintendent of the Mercer County ESC.

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