



OHIO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

Scott W. DiMauro, President
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April 3, 2025

The Honorable Brian Stewart
State Representative, District 12
77 South High St., 13th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Substitute House Bill 96

Dear Chairman Stewart:

On behalf of the nearly 120,000 members of the Ohio Education Association (OEA), this letter is to provide input on the recent changes made to the state budget bill in the House adoption of Substitute House Bill (Sub. HB) 96. OEA looks forward to continuing to work with the Ohio General Assembly to ensure that the resources needed to succeed are available for all of Ohio's public school students. To that end, the following are OEA's positions on some of the policy proposals contained in the House substitute version of the bill:

Public School Funding

There is no greater investment than ensuring that Ohio's children have the resources and support needed to succeed in school and in life. While OEA acknowledges that the House proposed budget includes an increase in public school funding over the next biennium, when compared to FY 2025 funding levels, we remain concerned that the school funding proposal contained in Sub. HB 96 falls short of ensuring that the state is adequately and equitably funding public schools and providing needed predictability of state support.

OEA remains supportive of the Fair School Funding formula that was passed in House Bill 110 from the 134th General Assembly and subsequently updated in the 135th General Assembly. This funding model, if implemented as intended, provides a stable and consistent student-centered formula focused on how much it costs to educate a child. Finally, we urge the General Assembly to support updating the cost inputs, as this is key to meeting the needs of Ohio's students.

School District Carryover Balances

OEA has serious concerns with a newly added provision that would limit a school district's year-over-year carryover fund to 25% of the previous fiscal year's operating expenses. Under the proposal in Sub. HB 96, funds more than 25% would be used to reduce property taxes. School districts carry over funds in large part due to the uncertainty of state funding they receive every two



years from the state's operating budget as they are required to maintain a five-year forecast when drafting their own budgets.

This policy would result in a loss of billions of dollars, forcing school districts to cut student programming while putting them at risk of financial instability. Additionally, this provision will force school districts to return to the ballot more often. While there is a need to address increased property taxes, OEA recommends that this provision be removed from the budget bill and considered with other property tax proposals pending in the legislature.

Vouchers

The House version of the budget creates yet another voucher program to use taxpayer money to pay private school tuition. OEA opposes this provision of the bill. The proposal is for the creation of an "education savings account" for students who attend non-chartered private schools. These schools eschew state oversight. Like Ohio's existing voucher programs, this expansion does not provide needed academic and financial accountability measures to ensure that this is a sound investment of taxpayer dollars.

The creation of this program will significantly add to the over \$1 billion a year that the state spends on private school tuition. The explosion of funding for private school vouchers undercuts the ability to fully and adequately fund Ohio's public schools. OEA calls upon the legislature to prioritize funding for public schools that serve around 90% of Ohio's students and are open to all.

OEA is also opposed to the expansion of eligibility for the existing Jon Peterson and Autism voucher programs. The substitute bill expands eligibility to students from age 3 to 22 and for non-chartered private school students and those who are home schooled. The programs would also allow for services to be provided virtually. These changes both increase the cost and decrease the accountability and oversight for the use of the funds and the education efficacy of the programs.

Teacher Assignment

OEA believes it is in the best interest of all students to have teachers who are licensed, trained, and prepared in the subjects and grade levels they are assigned to teach. OEA opposes budget language that appears to authorize, or encourage, teacher assignment without regard to teacher license qualifications or specific training requirements required by the Ohio General Assembly. Abandoning objective standards and qualifications to guide teacher assignment makes it less likely that all students will have a trained and prepared educator in every classroom. OEA requests this provision be removed from the bill.

Teacher Licensure

OEA requests a drafting correction to language in Sub. HB 96 pertaining to the State Board of Education that would entangle local teacher evaluations with state teacher licensure. Evaluations are used for local employment decisions, whereas licensure is used as a statewide employment credential. Therefore, OEA requests deleting HB 96 language that would allow local evaluations to

be used as part of the state resident educator (RE) licensure program. OEA supports related language that eliminates the summative assessment video portion of the RE program.

School Employee Vacancy Survey

OEA requests that the House reinsert the provision that was removed in the substitute bill that requires a school employee vacancy data to be collected by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW). This survey will help provide data to guide recruitment and support strategies that will ensure all students have highly trained and prepared school employees. There currently is no central source of information to allow for accurate, real-time tracking of educator shortages or surpluses at the state level. This survey will allow policymakers in the state legislature and DEW to create sound policy to address educator shortage issues based on data to help pinpoint hard-to-fill positions and monitor the trends to allow for long-term strategic planning to close these staffing gaps.

Testing Provisions

The substitute bill restores testing exemptions and alternative assessments in current law for students with severe cognitive disabilities. The bill restores district flexibility in diagnostic testing. These are positive changes that OEA supports.

Further, the bill eliminates the requirement that districts administer the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). The KRA provides useful data about students to educators and policymakers. However, administration of the test is seen by many educators to be onerous and time consuming because it comes early in the school year when students are adjusting to classroom norms and the demands on educators are especially high. Educators can assess the needs and capabilities of their students in other ways. OEA supports the further reduction of the number of state-mandated tests to restore time for teaching and learning in the classroom.

Transportation Workgroup

The substitute bill proposes the creation of a transportation workgroup to annually monitor and review the student transportation system and develop recommendations for changes to better meet the transportation needs of Ohio students. OEA supports this recommendation and requests that bus drivers be included in this workgroup.

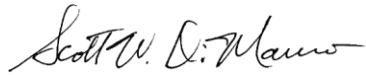
State Board of Education

OEA opposes a provision in the bill that would remove elected members from the State Board of Education (SBOE). Two years ago, the legislature curtailed the authority of the State Board of Education by removing most of its duties. Now, the House version of the budget bill would remove all elected members from the SBOE and reduce the Board to five members appointed by the governor. OEA's legislative policies call for a fully elected school board. OEA opposes removing the voice of the public from the SBOE.

Additionally, OEA has questions with the way in which the SBOE will be funded. OEA opposes any increase in teacher licensure fees to pay for any potential gap in funding from the state.

Thank you for your consideration of OEA's positions as outlined above. We respectfully request the Ohio House modify Substitute House Bill 96 to support public education and Ohio's students by addressing these concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Scott W. DiMauro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Scott DiMauro
President, Ohio Education Association

CC: Members of the Ohio House of Representatives