



May 6, 2016

OEA President Becky Higgins Testifies in Support of E-School Accountability Bill

OEA President Becky Higgins provided proponent testimony on SB 298 in the Ohio Senate Finance Committee on May 3, 2016. President Higgins called on the Ohio Senate to pass the e-school accountability and transparency provisions in SB 298, which are needed to supplement the charter school accountability measures recently passed in HB 2.

"All in all, SB 298 reflects ongoing efforts to make sure all publicly funded education programs in Ohio have a fair, but rigorous, system of accountability and transparency that adequately protects students, parents and taxpayers," Higgins said. "The provisions in the bill aim to advance a flexible, modern approach to accountability and transparency."

SB 298 was introduced by Senate Minority Leader Joe Shiavoni (D-Boardman), who previously stated that "we need to make sure that online schools are accurately reporting attendance and not collecting tax dollars for students who never log-in to take classes."

The bill would require charter e-schools to keep better attendance records, among other related reforms:

- Require online schools to keep records of the number of hours each student is participating in coursework daily, and to submit those records to ODE.

- Require online schools to notify the state, parents and a student's district of residence if the student doesn't log in to school coursework for 10 days straight.
- Require a licensed teacher to check attendance logs for accuracy monthly.
- Require sponsors to report to ODE when e-schools don't comply with learning standards.
- Establish an E-School Funding Commission to determine costs of running online schools.
- Require public, online live-streaming of governing board meetings for e-schools, with advanced notice of meetings published in newspapers in students' communities.
- Require that e-school report cards reflect the spring assessment results for a student who was enrolled at least 90 days in an e-school, but subsequently transferred and took the test in the district of residence.
- Require online schools to publish a disclaimer showing their state report card grades on all advertising.

In other proponent testimony, former Ohio Virtual Academy adviser Brianne Kramer spoke about her experience working for the school between November 2013 and November 2014. During the 2014-15 school year, she said the administration did not seem to be concerned about attendance, truancy or low student performance. Based on her experience and observations, “the only concern of those in the K-12 administration was gaining more students in order to make larger profits,” she said.

Additional testimony urging the passage of SB 298 was provided by representatives of other statewide public school associations, Belpre City Schools Superintendent Tony Dunn, Southside Academy Board of Directors President Bill Mullane, former ECOT parent Elizabeth Stillgress, as well as written testimony from Olmsted City School Board Vice President Terry Groden.

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House Education Committee Amendment to HB 481 Would Eliminate Safe-Harbor from Ed Choice Voucher Eligibility

The House Education Committee passed HB 481 at its second hearing on May 3, 2016, after amending the bill to eliminate safe-harbor from Ed Choice voucher eligibility in current law. OEA strongly opposes the EdChoice voucher eligibility amendment and will advocate for its removal from the bill.

The primary focus of HB 481 was originally the extension of safe-harbor that protects schools from losing funding for students that did not take a state mandated achievement assessment in the previous school year (unless specifically excused). HB 481 would extend this funding safe-harbor into the 2015-16 school year, in addition to safe-harbor already provided for 2014-15. OEA supports the extension of this school funding safe-harbor provision into 2015-16.

However, OEA strongly opposes the amendment that takes a contradictory approach to EdChoice voucher eligibility safe-harbor, which is eliminated. Current law provides school districts and schools safe-harbor from a list of sanctions or penalties that would otherwise apply based on report cards issued for 2014-15, 2015-16 and/or 2016-17. Amended HB 481 removes EdChoice voucher eligibility from this list of sanctions or penalties for which safe-harbor is provided.

Representative Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo), Ranking Democrat on the committee, objected to the amendment removing safe-harbor from EdChoice voucher eligibility. She said the point of safe harbor is for schools to avoid being punished for a system in which lawmakers don't have full confidence because of recent changes in testing. Chairman Andy Brenner (R-Powell) countered that without the amendment, the pool of schools and districts in which students are EdChoice-eligible might actually shrink.

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Governor Kasich Picks Nancy Hollister for State School Board Vacancy

Gov. John Kasich announced Tuesday that he is appointing Nancy Hollister, who served briefly as Ohio's first female governor, to the State Board of Education.

Kasich's office said attorney and human resources professional Robert McDonald Jr., his previous pick to fill the vacancy left by former Rep. Bob Hagan's resignation, had resigned.

Hollister will have to run in November to retain the 8th District board seat for the remainder of Hagan's term, which expires at the end of 2018.

Hollister is a veteran of multiple state and local offices. She was mayor of Marietta in 1991 when then-Gov. George Voinovich appointed her to lead the Governor's Office of Appalachia. Three years later, he named her as his second-term running mate, as Mike DeWine, then lieutenant governor, was running for the U.S. Senate.

Hollister then served four years as Voinovich's No. 2, and when he won election to the U.S. Senate at the end of his second term, she briefly ascended to the governor's office for a gap of several days between Voinovich's departure for the Senate and Gov.-elect Bob Taft's assumption of office. She then quickly moved to a House seat to replace Rep. Tom Johnson, Taft's appointee as budget director. She lost the seat in 2004 to Democrat Jennifer Garrison.

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