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Contact your Government
Relations Team

David Williams
Director
williamsd@ohea.org

Melissa Clark
Lobbyist
clarkm@ohea.org

Robert Davis
Lobbyist
davisr@ohea.org

Matthew Dotson
Lobbyist
dotsonm@ohea.org

Dan Ramos
UniServ Political Advocacy
Consultant
ramosd@ohea.org

Russ Harris
Education Research
Development Consultant
harrisr@ohea.org

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Last minute, surprise legislative amendment sets the stage for state takeover of Youngstown City Schools

On Wednesday, June 24, 2015, the Senate Education Committee accepted an unannounced 66-page amendment to House Bill (HB) 70 that requires a state takeover of certain consistently low-performing school districts. HB 70 was then rushed to the Senate floor for passage. The House quickly concurred with the Senate action last night. The bill now goes to the Governor. Under the criteria listed in the amendment, at this time Youngstown City Schools is only the district that would be subject to the amendment's takeover provisions.

The bill now creates an expanded version of "Academic Distress Commissions," giving a district "CEO" complete control and weakening the collective bargaining process until school report card ratings improve.

The Senate Education Committee accepted the surprise takeover amendment by a 7-5 vote, with all Democrats and one Republican – Sen. Gayle Manning - voting "No." The Ohio Education Association testified in opposition to the bill in committee and lobbied the Senate for "No" votes. The Senate vote was 18-14, with all Senate Democrats who were present and five Republicans – Senators Hughes, Manning, Oelslager, Seitz and Jones - voting "No." A Democrat motion to refer the bill back to committee failed.

The House agreed to the Senate changes to HB 70 late last night by a vote of 55-40. All House Democrats who were present voted "No" and removed their names as co-sponsors of the bill, which had previously only dealt with establishing a community learning center model for schools. The Republican "No" votes were Reps. Brinkman, Butler, Dever, Hood, N. Manning, Rezabek, Thompson and Vitale. The bill now goes to Governor Kasich and will become effective 90 days after he signs it (sometime in early October).

The school takeover amendment was mainly developed by Youngstown-Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce President Tom Humphries and Youngstown State President Jim Tressel. In his testimony, Humphries indicated they did not consult with the Youngstown mayor, local legislators, the local school board or teachers. Former Ohio State football coach and current Youngstown State University



President Jim Tressel also testified in support of the takeover amendment.

In addition to OEA opposition testimony, Senate Minority Leader Joe Schiavoni (D-Youngstown) testified against the amendment. Democratic legislators representing parts of Youngstown City Schools were also in attendance to show opposition.

The HB 70 school takeover amendment does the following:

- Requires each school that receives an F report card grade to put in place an improvement coordinator to lead academic turnaround efforts. If the school doesn't improve by the third year, a 5-member commission would be created that consists of three members appointed by the state superintendent, one member appointed by a local government executive and one teacher chosen by the school board.
- The commission would be tasked with appointing a CEO to run the district until it improves to a C grade, which will trigger a two-year transition plan to hand back the management and control of the operations to the district.
- In the first year, the CEO would have full managerial and operational control over the district and would be responsible for working with the commission to collaborate with the community to craft an improvement plan that must be submitted to the state within 120 days of the commission being formed.
- As the five-year process moves forward, the CEO gains more control in each year. By the third year he or she would be permitted to close schools and reconstitute them into community (ie. charter) schools and could suspend collective bargaining agreements as long as there is no reduction in per-hour compensation or insurance benefits.
- Expands EdChoice voucher eligibility to all district school buildings if not already eligible.
- Accepted floor amendments offered by Minority Leader Rep. Joe Schiavoni (D-Boardman) that would require one or more of the superintendent's appointments to be a resident of the county where a majority of the school district is located and specify that the CEO serves at the pleasure of the Academic Distress Commission.