

**Richard Lewis: HB 512 would diminish public input in education**  
**Should Ohio boost governor's education power? No: State school board ensures accountability**  
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Ohio lawmakers have introduced a proposal — House Bill 512 — that supporters claim solves Ohio's education workforce readiness challenges. They say it would tackle complex issues like Ohio's college remediation rates and would better prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow. Yet, nowhere in the 2,430 pages of the bill's "fixes" are there any solutions to these problems.

Instead, HB 512 undermines the role and authority of Ohio's State Board of Education by shifting nearly all of its duties to a new state agency called the Department of Learning and Achievement. It also combines the Department of Education, the Department of Higher Education and the Office of Workforce Transformation into this new agency created by the bill. As a result, members of the State Board of Education would no longer be acting in any significant way on behalf of the citizens they represent.

Seated atop this new agency would be a politically appointed, unelected and unaccountable executive director, hand-picked by the governor. This person would be given tremendous power and would be unilaterally responsible for creating, implementing and overseeing all aspects of our K-12 and higher-education systems. It is likely there will be frequent and extreme swings in education policy whenever a new governor is elected.

Our primary objection is that changing the current structure removes the transparency and accountability to the public that is currently embedded in the process. While the legislature will continue to pass laws related to public education, the implementation of those laws and the administrative rules that school districts live by would be dictated by the administration, rather than through an open process that allows citizens and stakeholders to participate in the education policymaking process.

This proposal signals a significant departure from our current system. HB 512 would move decisions about important topics like setting the state's learning standards, graduation requirements and school-district report cards to a politically appointed staff as opposed to the current process that includes many opportunities for public input.

The bill's supporters claim that no one knows who their elected representative to the State Board of Education is. So, they ask, "Why do we allow these unknown people to craft education policy?" By that logic, one must ask, "Who knows the members of the House and Senate Education Committees?" They're the ones responsible for most of our education laws.

Supporters of the bill also say our state needs a renewed focus on job readiness. If this need to align workforce readiness to Ohio's education system is so dire, then why hasn't the governor appointed Ohio's top education official — the superintendent of public instruction — to the governor's own Executive Workforce Board? And, of the governor's own appointees to the state board, why isn't any an expert on workforce readiness?

Proponents conclude that this bill is a way to fix the education obstacles facing our state. Yet the answer to the problems facing education is not a massive reorganization of our state education agencies. Instead, the real solutions are in investments in early-childhood education and wraparound services that address the health and well-being of Ohio's children. It's an adequate and equitable school funding model. It's empowering everyone from local districts to superintendents, principals, teachers and career-tech programs to make the decisions that best fit their own unique and diverse needs.

HB 512 cannot divert our attention away from our real education challenges by pretending that a new, unaccountable bureaucracy is the solution. This bill is bad for accountability and transparency, and it's worse for our students. HB 512 is bad for Ohio.

**Richard Lewis is chief executive officer of the Ohio School Boards Association, which seeks educational excellence by serving the state's public-school board members and their districts.**