

December 2020 Legislative Report

Equitable Funding: “Legislation that would overhaul how Ohio education is funded - the result of three years of compromise among lawmakers from different political parties, negotiations among district superintendents and treasurers from different parts of the state and buy-in from teachers unions, school boards and other groups – is not going to pass this year, key Republicans said.”

So opens a December 9th [article on Cleveland.com](#). If you're a glutton for punishment, then use the link to read more. The best hope for equitable, constitutional school funding in Ohio is currently dying in the Senate. You may also curse openly (as long as your Meet is muted), throw things, or add this to the litany of reasons to cry oneself to sleep.

Senate Bill 358: This bill (referenced in prior Reports) is the one that would provide districts with flexibility regarding the 3rd grade guarantee and the grad requirement.

It was amended to suggest that ODE could pursue a waiver on testing if the Biden Harris administration offers them. The bill was also amended to [include paths out of state control](#) for those districts impacted by HB70 & the “Youngstown Plan.” These include Youngstown, Lorain, and East Cleveland.

While the bill passed easily out of the Education Committee, it has yet to be heard by the entire Senate (or House, or considered by Governor DeWine).

Voucher Expansion: The Ohio General Assembly and Governor DeWine limited the amount of schools eligible for Ohio's EdChoice Voucher Program, while simultaneously [expanding the voucher program](#). The new language “raises the household income cap from 200% of the federal poverty level to 250%. That would mean an annual household income of \$65,500 for a family of four, up from \$52,400” is eligible. While the new law prevents more affluent districts from having buildings become eligible for vouchers according to a scheduled expansion, it makes more available in districts where vouchers are already available.

The Chronicle Telegram [featured an excellent article](#) on the negative ramifications of the voucher expansion on Elyria and Lorain. In it, Superintendent Schloss took as strong a position as she's ever taken with regard to the state's influence on education and its negative impact on impoverished urban districts. “Private schools don't have to take the assessments and aren't judged the same way. It's just not a level playing field in that way,” Schloss said. “To include schools that get A's, B's and C's and to only focus it on poverty and those demographics, I have a huge issue with.”

GREAT NEWS! (if you like guns in school): Senate Bill 317 would amend existing law to allow districts to [permit school personnel to carry firearms in schools](#) after as little as 8 hours of concealed carry training. The bill, which passed in the Senate a few weeks ago, is championed by term limited Republican Senator Bill Coley who says it's necessary in rural areas, and is in

the interest of “local control” of school districts. Unsurprisingly, Senator Coley does not support local control when it comes to standardized testing, the 3rd grade guarantee, the grad requirement, state takeovers, or anything else for that matter. The Police Chiefs of Cincinnati, Dayton, Cleveland, Toledo, Youngstown, and Columbus have voiced opposition to the bill. That said, it has a better chance of passing than improved school funding and flexibility for districts due to COVID, as described above.

Photoshop your face on John Wayne to get a sense of SB 317 in action.

