

February 2021 Legislative Report

An Introduction: In 2014, then Representative Andrew Brenner said that “Public schools in America are socialism.” He has been named the new Chair of the Senate Education Committee.

And the Senator who made [national news](#) suggesting that the “colored population” has higher rates of coronavirus infection because they “don’t wash their hands as well as other groups,” he’s on the Education Committee as well.

The Committee assignments for the Senate and House were established over the past month. These groups represent the first set of individuals to contact in the interest of encouraging or resisting the passage of education related legislation. You can find the contact information for the members of these committees [here](#).

COVID flexibility: While building principals & teachers were given greater control with regard to the [3rd grade guarantee](#), the last General Assembly failed to act regarding eliminating standardized tests and providing flexibility for students with regard to the graduation requirement.

Fortunately, Senators Fedor and Manning have introduced [Senate Bill 37](#) that would create graduation flexibility for the 2020-2021 school year. The bill’s language would also eliminate all standardized testing that is not federally mandated, and seek a waiver from the Biden administration to eliminate testing that is. PLEASE CONTACT THE SENATE AND HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEES TO URGE THE PASSAGE OF THIS BILL. I have included the letter that I sent to these individuals below. You might find it useful as a model for what you might write.

Our Representation at the State Level: Elyria’s Senator [Nathan Manning](#) was not appointed to the Education Committee for this session of the General Assembly. This is a bit unfortunate as Senator Manning has championed legislation backed by educators (see above), and has also been an advocate of ending state takeovers of districts, specifically with regard to Lorain. Senator Manning will still be an advocate for the Elyria Schools and should be encouraged to back legislation that positively impacts educational outcomes.

In the House, Elyria’s Representative [Gayle Manning](#) has been named Chair of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. This position gives Representative Manning greater influence over what bills are heard and voted on by the Committee. As a former educator, Rep Manning has previously introduced legislation to reduce standardized testing to federal levels, and has been instrumental in the passage of laws to help the Elyria Schools specifically.

The Budget: Governor DeWine’s budget proposal does return education funding to pre-pandemic levels, but it does nothing to eliminate deductions from local districts for charters and private schools, and it does not establish a fair and equitable school funding formula. Read

more [here](#). The budget will be heard and changed by the House and Senate before its passage in a few months.

The Fordham Institute: In nearly every story on education policy in Ohio, the media seek out the Fordham Institute as experts on the subject. The problem is, while they claim to be a conservative “think tank” on policy issues, they are charter school advocates and sponsors. The [Ohio Capital Journal recently published an account](#) of this problematic dichotomy in an organization that has excessive influence on policy decisions in Columbus.

Contact Your Legislators: Contacting legislators is as simple as recognizing yourself as an expert in your field, telling your story, and encouraging some action. Be respectful, as brief as possible, and include all of your contact info. What follows is a letter I sent all members of the House and Senate Education Committees last week in support of COVID-19 flexibility as written in Senate Bill 37.

Senator/Representative so and so,

I am a long time American History teacher at Elyria High School. The state's Graduation Requirement includes a standardized test in my content area. Depending on their academic path, this year my sophomore students will be required to take ELA, American History, and Biology assessments in the interest of earning their diploma. Eighth and ninth graders, again depending on their academic path, will take an Algebra test on which their graduation is dependent. Requiring a student to pass a standardized test in order to earn a diploma is questionable under normal circumstances, and is completely inappropriate under current conditions.

I urge your support of Senate Bill 37 to revise 2020-2021 Education Law due to COVID-19.

In my school, some students have attended virtual classes all year. Others started the year hybrid, attending 2 days, then working independently the other 3. Those students attended virtual classes in December and January, and have now returned to the building. All students are now attending 4 days of classes whether in person or online.

Just this week 4 of my students were forced into quarantine due to being exposed to the virus. Over the course of the school year, students and teachers have tested positive and missed school. We have endured the threat of the virus while creating and working within entirely new models of learning. Many of my students help to care for younger siblings. Others have maintained employment to help their families survive economic uncertainty. Still others do their best to cope with mental health issues exacerbated by the pandemic.

There is absolutely no way that the use of standardized tests as a mechanism to earn a diploma is reasonable under these conditions. It is not equitable or an accurate depiction of the academic work students are putting in on a daily basis. They deserve better. Please support legislation that suspends the high stakes language that ties standardized test performance to a

student's ability to earn a diploma, either by allowing them to use course grades as test scores within the current system, or otherwise. Furthermore, please support language that would cancel this year's standardized testing in Ohio that is not mandated by the federal government, and request a waiver from the Biden administration's Department of Education to cancel federally mandated tests.

Thank you for your consideration, and potential support of Senate Bill 37.

Matthew T. Jablonski

Address, Phone, & Email.