

Sweeping K-12 Legislation Awaits Governor's Signature

The General Assembly finalized legislation containing a raft of primary and secondary education policy changes Wednesday ahead of summer recess.

The House concurred in Senate amendments to a bill ([HB 583](#)) initially focused on educational requirements for substitute teachers that became a vehicle for lawmakers to address several education-related concerns ahead of the 2022-23 school year.

The vote on the measure was 54-36, with [Rep. Jay Edwards](#) (R-Nelsonville), [Rep. Diane Grendell](#) (R-Chesterland), [Rep. Tom Patton](#) (R-Strongsville) and [Rep. Jean Schmidt](#) (R-Loveland) siding with the chamber's Democrats against concurrence.

The bill ballooned in size over the last month, with amendments that would delay the implementation of mandatory dyslexia screenings for students, pause penalties related to the Ohio School Report Cards and incorporate legislation ([SB 306](#)) establishing a statewide tutoring option to address pandemic-related learning loss, among other changes. ([Analysis](#))

"These changes to the bill all need to be passed now," said [Rep. Don Jones](#) (R-Freeport), a lead sponsor of HB583. "We owe this to our students and our staffs and our school districts as they prepare most abruptly for the upcoming school year."

The bill cleared the Senate last week over the objections of the chamber's Democrats, who opposed revisions to the legislation affecting EdChoice Expansion scholarship awards, among other changes.

Those provisions end the practice of prorating family income-based awards for students whose family incomes surpass 250% of the federal poverty level in subsequent school years. The amendment also qualifies siblings of scholarship recipients to receive funds through the private school voucher program.

[Rep. Phillip Robinson](#) (D-Solon) said the former voucher-related change "defeats the purpose of the income-based portion of the program."

The lawmaker also argued a revision allowing unexpended funds in Afterschool Child Enrichment Educational Saving Accounts to be rolled over until they are spent or an account holder's child graduates creates a "slippery slope" that essentially makes the program permanent.

Rep. Robinson also criticized the lack of an emergency clause in the Senate-passed bill.

"It feels a little bit like a bait and switch," the lawmaker said. "We wanted to solve for one problem, and now we have over 10 amendments adding things that were not originally intended on this bill."

[Rep. Catherine Ingram](#) (D-Cincinnati) called the revised bill "this nonsense that has come back from the Senate." She specifically took aim at an upper chamber amendment allowing a charter school otherwise barred from seeking a new sponsor to do so without obtaining approval from ODE next school year.

"We've allowed for them in this bill with these amendments for them to do sponsor hopping," she said.

The House also voted 80-10 for a bill ([HB 497](#)) that would permanently eliminate a key aspect of the state's Third Grade Reading Guarantee policy.

Under the legislation, Ohio third graders who fail to meet an English language arts assessment benchmark would no longer be held back automatically. The bill would maintain a requirement that schools offer enhanced services to students reading below grade level.

Joint sponsor [Rep. Gayle Manning](#) (R-N. Ridgeville) questioned the benefit of retention the guarantee.

"We should be exposing kids to literacy earlier and more often so that when they do reach and reach third grade they have a solid foundation in literacy," she said. "This legislation does not change the fact students will receive intervention as they do now to ensure they can read."

And fellow sponsoring Rep. Robinson agreed, arguing that a "one size fits all" approach is not the way to go

Armed School Personnel Bill Sent To Governor

Armed teachers could soon be a reality in Ohio's schools.

Legislation ([HB 99](#)) to create exceptions for authorized personnel to be armed within a school safety zone in specified circumstances cleared the Senate Wednesday in a 23-9 vote.

[Sen. Stephanie Kunze](#) (R-Hilliard) and [Sen. Matt Dolan](#) (R-Chagrin Falls) joined Democrats in voting against the measure.

Members of the House later concurred in Senate amendments in a 56-34 vote, sending the measure to [Gov. Mike DeWine](#).

The Ohio Federation of Teachers and Ohio Education Association were among groups urging the governor to veto the bill, however he said in a statement he planned to sign it.

"Last week I called on the General Assembly to pass a bill that would allow local school districts, if they so chose, to designate armed staff for school security and safety. My office worked with the General Assembly to remove hundreds of hours of curriculum irrelevant to school safety and to ensure training requirements were specific to a school environment and contained significant scenario-based training," he said. "House Bill 99 accomplishes these goals, and I thank the General Assembly for passing this bill to protect Ohio children and teachers."

The latest version creates the Ohio School Safety and Crisis Center within the Department of Public Safety to be operated by the Ohio Mobile Training Team.

It also requires the Mobile Training Team to develop curriculum and provide instruction and training, including firearms training, that individuals may complete to be permitted to convey deadly weapons or dangerous ordnance into a school safety zone.

The bill also contains an appropriation of \$12 million to create the Mobile Training Team.

"This bill is completely permissive and allows local school boards to approve or disapprove an individual from carrying firearms in the school," [Sen. Frank Hoagland](#) (R-Mingo Junction) said.

He said the bill is aimed at enhancing and hardening safety protocols in schools.

"Ohio is taking ownership and the burden of ensuring a safe place for education," Sen. Hoagland said.

But [Sen. Cecil Thomas](#) (D-Cincinnati) took issue with the process, noting that the bill had just two hearings in the Senate.

He also raised concerns that the bill directs a minimum of 24-25 hours of training.

"This is madness," Sen. Thomas said. "We are talking about someone coming into an active shooter situation."

[Sen. Terry Johnson](#) (R-McDermott) argued that school boards can require as much training as they'd like. He also defended the right of 18-year-olds to legally purchase firearms, as the shooter in Uvalde, Texas did.

"We cannot keep punishing law-abiding citizens for the crimes of people that are not law-abiding citizens," he said.

[Sen. Teresa Fedor](#) (D-Toledo) unsuccessfully sought to amend the bill to boost the minimum training requirements, among other things.

After her amendment was tabled, she teed off on the bill and the legislative process controlled by Republicans.

"Do something about prevention," she said. "You can. You won't get fired by the NRA."

After a second speech by Sen. Thomas in which he repeatedly referred to Sen. Johnson as "Sen. Rodgers" and listed off a number of Democratic proposals on guns, [Sen. Steve Wilson](#) (R-Maineville) gave an uncharacteristically fiery speech.

In it, he urged his colleagues to heed the call of those in Dayton in the wake of a mass shooting to "do something."

In the House, sponsoring [Rep. Thomas Hall](#) (R-Middletown) argued that time is of the essence in school shootings.

"Seconds matter," he said.

Rep. Hall also maintained he listened to opponents and interested parties, including through the addition of notification requirement language.

[Rep. Juanita Brent](#) (D-Cleveland) was one of several House Democrats to speak out against the bill. She said police officers have 71 hours of gun training, while the bill would require only two for school personnel.

"This is a situation where you're going to have even more gun violence because somebody is going to get mad," she added.

[Rep. Jeffrey Crossman](#) (D-Parma) described the bill as "terrible policy."

"Educators don't want this," he said. "Our law enforcement community doesn't want this."

Nonetheless, [Rep. Adam Bird](#) (R-Cincinnati) said districts he represents want the choice to arm personnel because of lengthy response times from local law enforcement agencies.

In response to a question from [Rep. Dontavius Jarrells](#) (D-Columbus) about a teacher mistakenly shooting a student, Rep. Hall again reiterated that the bill is about the training required for a permissive practice.

[Rep. Phil Plummer](#) (R-Dayton), a former sheriff, said he trained two school districts in Montgomery County to deal with an active shooter.

"This is a piece of the puzzle where local elected officials can make the decision," he said.

After several floor speeches, House [Speaker Bob Cupp](#) (R-Lima) ordered the clerk to call the roll despite several Democrats who remained standing in hopes of speaking to the bill.

Earlier in the session, Democrats also attempted to amend a knife regulation bill with several of their firearm-related priorities, including a separate bill ([HB 274](#) Track) that restores local authority to generally regulate firearms-related conduct.

The amendment would have also made it more difficult for criminals to obtain firearms and reversed a magazine expansion law enacted by the 130th General Assembly, they said. Republicans rejected the move 55-33.

Gov. DeWine last week indicated he was supportive of HB99 but called for more stringent training standards than in the as-introduced versions which would have required as little as eight hours of training.

HB99 was introduced in response to a ruling by a divided Ohio Supreme Court that found a Butler County school district's policy allowing certain employees to carry firearms violated state law.

[Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor](#) joined the court's Democrats in a 4-3 ruling that Revised Code "prohibits a school from employing a person who goes armed while on duty in his or her job unless the employee has satisfactorily completed an approved basic peace-officer-training program or has 20 years of experience."

The measure was one of several bills finalized during what is expected to be the last session in both chambers until after the Aug. 2 primary election.