

Talking Points

SB 451 – Omnibus Education Bill

We adamantly disagree with the Republican legislative leadership's statements that our public schools rank 50th in everything and what is contained in SB 451 will improve our public schools.

West Virginia's public schools are succeeding

- Our public schools are succeeding but everyone would like to see them improve and all our students achieving at a high level. Our public schools are far more academically challenging than in the past and the expectations for our students are high. We recognize that all students progress at different levels. They come into our public schools with different levels of preparedness and they will not all be at subject mastery at the same time.
- When you look at the top tier of states in terms of student achievement they have several items in common. Two of the most significant are the percent of students in poverty and the educational attainment levels of adults. States with the lowest percentages of student poverty and the highest percentage of adults with college degrees tend to score higher in student achievement.
- WV has one of the highest incidences of children living in poverty in the nation. While that does not prevent a child from achieving, it often means that students start more slowly and need additional services to reach their full potential.
- WV is 50th in the nation in the number of adults 25-65 with at least a bachelor's degree.
- In WV, student achievement ranks highest in counties that have the most educated adults and the lowest percentage of students living in poverty.
- Society's problems do not stop at the doors of our schools and our children's focus is disrupted by what is going on in their family and surroundings. Our students are facing the highest numbers ever for those living in foster homes and living with someone other than a parent.
- Our highest achieving students are quite competitive when compared with their peers in student achievement. And when you compare the student achievement of WV's kids living in poverty against students in other states living in poverty, our students score exceptionally well.
- Poverty and generations of low levels of educational attainment cannot be overcome quickly. WV is making progress but without the proper supports it has taken more time than any of us would like.

What can help our public schools improve?

- By looking at the laundry list of items included in SB 451 it is difficult to see how anyone could look at that mixture of items and determine it will help our student succeed.
- The list includes many punitive items that are anti-public schools and anti-employee. Many of the items have been attempted before by the Republican leadership and failed to pass on their own merits.

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- Not only are the items not proven to improve student achievement, but many are proven to be divisive and will actually do harm to existing public schools and students by taking much needed funding away from our public schools.
- Charters, ESAs and vouchers take funding away from our public schools and give it to other entities. We should focus on investing in schools where 90% of our children go and not diverting money to other education/privatization schemes.
- We must provide a great public school for every student in the state. Improving public schools requires more money, not less. Every student deserves a quality, well-equipped school where they can learn, be inspired and thrive.
- If we are serious about improving our public schools then let's look at proven reforms. This means creating schools with inviting classrooms, a well-rounded curriculum, class sizes that are small enough for one-on-one attention and support services such as health care, nutrition and after-school programs for students who need them.
- Our students need extended day and summer programs; alternative education facilities; expanded vocational education options; additional specialists, including special education teachers, school counselors, nurses and psychologists; and resources to help parents.
- Everyone wants to improve our public schools and there are many proven ways to increase student achievement. The items introduced as reform measures in the omnibus education bill are not designed to improve our schools or the schools of any state.
- We should invest in the things that are proven to make schools great and help every student achieve to their peak potential regardless of their zip code.

Retaliation, retribution and anti-employee sentiment

- Many of the items in the omnibus bill are directed at education employees and are continued attempts by the Republican leadership to erode employee rights and weaken employee voices.
- Items such as payroll deduction and erosion of seniority have been defeated on their own merits in prior legislative sessions and are now being lumped into this bill to garner support and move their anti-employee agenda.
- This bill from the Republican Senate leadership is retaliation for the actions of educators last February and March. Some senators have told their constituents as much.
- Most of the items in the bill have been written by interests outside WV who look to profit from the changes in the bill. Many states that have adopted these same proposals in the past are now turning away from them due to lack of results and mismanagement.