



# CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCES NEWSLETTER

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## MISSION

Richland Academy of the Arts' authorizing mission is to provide the oversight, monitoring, technical assistance, resources and leadership needed and wanted by its sponsored schools for them to provide their students with superior academic opportunities while maintaining sound financial viability without violating their autonomy.

## VISION

Our authorizing vision is to be the sponsor of choice for community schools in Ohio. By not limiting imagination, we will honor developmental abilities and the growth of the whole child. We will cultivate communities who believe children need to grow up experiencing the arts and contributing back to their families and communities.

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## ***Deliberations continue over academic intervention bill***

As previously reported, the Ohio House Education Committee is considering legislation (S.B. 19) passed by the Senate last fall to require districts and schools to provide evidence-based academic intervention services, free of cost, to students who demonstrate a limited level of skills in state assessments in math or English language arts or diagnostic assessments in math.

The committee adopted a substitute version of the bill, eliminating a requirement that math improvement and monitoring plans be developed for each student who qualifies for intervention services.

House Education Committee Chair Sarah Fowler Arthur (R-Ashtabula) noted that there is no evidence that improvement and monitoring plans are the "catalyst to improve scores for reading" in an interview with *Gongwer News Service*.

The Ohio Education Association opposes the math intervention plan requirement and has advocated for changes to the bill.

"From the experience of reading improvement and monitoring plans, I can tell you that this is an onerous task that will often fall on classroom teachers," OEA President Jeff Wensing testified. He also raised concerns over determining a student's need for intervention services based on a single test on a single day.

## ***Education a central theme in Governor's last State of the State Address***

Last month, Governor Mike DeWine gave his last State of the State Address in which education was a central theme. He highlighted programs that have made a positive difference for students and families, and outlined key efforts ahead to ensure all Ohio students can reach their full potential.

Efforts to improve literacy through instruction and materials aligned to the "Science of Reading" continue. The Governor also outlined a plan to create instructional implementation teams, expand the ReadOhio coaching program, and offer ReadOhio coaching and credentialing at no cost for current literacy coaches.

Governor DeWine also stressed the importance of reducing chronic absenteeism through early intervention and announced a new statewide attendance dashboard launching April 15.

He highlighted the Governor's Healthy Ohio Team Tressel Fitness Challenge which is helping more than 390,000 participating students set their own wellness goals.

Additionally, he extended thanks to the co-sponsors of legislation (H.B. 304) that would allow schools to permit a high school student to substitute club sports or other athletic activities to fulfill physical education requirements, and would require public schools to provide 30 minutes of recess twice a day for all K-8 students, except for days in which a student is attending a physical education course.



## ***In other legislative news***

The Ohio Senate and House education committees have held hearings on a variety of bills of interested to K-12 education stakeholders including:

**S.B. 144** to require the State Board of Education to: specify whether an educator is licensed to teach grades preK-5, grades 4-8, or grades 7-12; issue licenses for grades preK-5 that authorize a license holder to provide either general education instruction or both general and special education instruction; and, issue licenses for grades 4-8 that authorize a license holder to provide general education instruction.

**S.B. 326** to require school districts to offer, and students to complete, at least one high school computer science course.

**S.B. 328** to require public schools to offer at least one-half unit in the study of career exploration to students in grades 6-8 that aligns with the professional skills standards and career coaching framework established by the Department of Education and Workforce.

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## ***Fetal development education plan sent to Senate***

Legislation (H.B. 485) passed by the Ohio House of Representatives in November has been sent to the Senate and assigned to its education committee.

The bill would require public schools to provide human growth and development instruction in its curriculum for grades 5-12, which must include a high-definition ultrasound video and the “Meet Baby Olivia” video produced by Live Action, or its successor entity, or a substantially similar video.

Senator Andy Brenner (R-Delaware), who chairs the Senate Education Committee, told *Gongwer News Service* that changes will likely occur in the upper chamber where similar legislation (S.B. 310) has been introduced.

House Bill 485’s sponsor, Representative Melanie Miller (R-Ashland), has indicated that she is open to changes.

The Senate bill would require fetal development instruction to include a high-quality, computer-generated animation or a high-definition ultrasound video, at least three minutes in duration, showing the development of the brain, heart and other vital organs in early fetal development. It does not reference the “Meet Baby Olivia” video.

## ***STRS board elects new chair***

At its March meeting, the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) board elected Michael Harkness to serve as chair after a court removed former chair, Rudy Fichtenbaum, following a ruling that he (and another member) violated his fiduciary duty.

Harkness, an elected member of the board and an Akron Public Schools special educator teacher, will fill Fichtenbaum’s term as chair which ends August 31. Pat Davidson will continue to serve as vice chair

The board also adopted a strategic framework to inform future benefit decisions, which members describe as setting funding benchmarks and guardrails to “ensure benefit decisions are made deliberately, transparently and with long-term sustainability as the priority.”

That framework was put into action with a vote to provide a 1.6 percent cost-of-living increase for eligible beneficiaries in fiscal year 2027.

At its April meeting, the board is likely to consider Fichtenbaum’s replacement for the remainder of his term which extends through 2029.

## ***House debates bill allowing for volunteer chaplains in schools***

Legislation (H.B. 531) to allow districts and schools to receive support, services and programs for students by a volunteer chaplain is under consideration by the House Education Committee.

The bill is permissive, rather than a mandate, and calls for chaplains to undergo criminal records checks and register with the Department of Education and Workforce.

Committee members are split on whether the bill violates the separation of church and state. Democrats question chaplains’ qualifications and potential for bias. Republicans claim the bill would help meet students’ mental health needs.

In testimony before the House Education Committee, humanist chaplain Ben Iten noted that chaplain training is based in religious education and is often “not as rigorous” as other forms of training counselors receive. The role of chaplains, he explained, includes praying with individuals, baptizing them and providing the Eucharist.

Various stakeholders have raised concerns that the bill does not address how chaplain services would be managed, is unclear on whether chaplains would be required to report child abuse and neglect, and lacks needed oversight on chaplains’ qualifications.



## Legislative news — continued

**S.C.R. 16** to urge Congress to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education.

**H.B. 125** to require districts to count a student who participates in a district-approved school-sponsored or work-force preparation activity during school hours as being present at school.

**H.B. 326** to establish the Classical Learning Test as an approved college admission exam in Ohio as an alternative to the SAT and ACT. According to the bill's sponsor, the assessment aligns with classical education values emphasizing logic, reasoning and philosophy.

**H.B. 462** to permit schools and camps to procure epinephrine nasal sprays and other epinephrine devices or products approved by the USFDA for use in emergency situations in the same capacity as they may currently procure epinephrine autoinjectors.



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## House passes bill to improve foster children's educational attainment

Last month, the Ohio House of Representatives approved a substitute version of legislation (H.B. 25) aimed at improved educational attainment for children in foster care.

The substitute bill, passed by a vote of 92-1, requires public schools to designate a local foster care education liaison to support foster care students and to designate a building staff member as the foster family navigator serving as the primary point of contact to support students placed in foster care attending that school. It also requires the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) director to work with other specified state agency leaders to encourage the sharing of best practices.

"I've been working on this bill for over about four years," said Representative Dontavius Jarrells (D-Columbus), a co-sponsor of the legislation. "Out of that what I've seen is foster youth who have come to this body and asked for a hand up. Foster youth who ... want to stay, they want to work, they want to be their best selves in this state."

Co-sponsor Representative Sharon Ray (R-Wadsworth) said working on the bill has been "a unifying experience," also noting that foster care youth's stories were "the catalyst needed to fix our current system."

The bill has been sent to the Senate and assigned to its Education Committee.

## State Board names new superintendent of public instruction

The State Board of Education recently announced that Dr. Philip H. Wagner will serve as Ohio's next superintendent of public instruction.

Dr. Wagner will be the Buckeye State's 41<sup>st</sup> superintendent – the second since the Legislature split the board from the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW). He was one of six candidates interviewed for the leadership position.

He currently serves as superintendent of Johnstown-Monroe Local Schools and will continue in that role until assuming his new responsibilities late July. In the meantime, DEW's chief legal counsel, Jason Wagner, will serve as interim superintendent.

Dr. Wagner has more than three decades of service to Ohio's education community. He earned his bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. from Kent State University.

Former Superintendent Paul Craft assumed his new role with the U.S. Department of Defense in March.

## Legal fight over state reading instruction mandates back in play

By a vote of 3-1, the 10<sup>th</sup> District Court of Appeals recently reversed the dismissal of a claim that Ohio's ban on the "three-cueing" method of reading instruction in favor of the "Science of Reading" in an appeal filed by the Reading Recovery Council of North America.

The lower court dismissed the case more than a year ago after a judge ruled that the "aggrieved party, as alleged by the Complaint and as noted by Defendants, would be school boards. Thus, Plaintiffs are attempting to assert a claim on behalf of a third party."

The appeals court disagreed.

"They detailed injuries in fact: loss of membership, decline of registrations to their annual conference, and an inability for Dr. Molasso to carry out the mission of RRCNA," the appeals court ruling states.



## Legislative news – continued

**H.B. 486** to enact the Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act to permit teachers in public schools to provide instruction on the influence of Christianity on history and culture.

**H.B. 523** to allow public schools to pay student teachers an hourly wage that is no less than the state minimum wage and offer a student teacher healthcare benefits on the same terms and conditions as those offered to the school's teachers. It also would require the Department of Job and Family Services to add teachers to the list of in-demand jobs in Ohio.

**H.B. 711** to expand the minimum teacher salary schedule categories for advanced degrees from one to three and set base minimum salaries for each.



## DEW to revise report card calculation

The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) is proposing a recalibration of early literacy benchmarks to address the dramatic impact of a provision of the state biennial budget bill (H.B. 96) enacted last year.

DEW currently evaluates early literacy efforts on state report cards based on three factors: third grade reading proficiency (40 percent), K-3 literacy improvement (25 percent) and promotion to fourth grade (35 percent).

Under provisions of H.B. 96, ratings would be based solely on students who attain a promotion score on the third-grade English language arts or alternative assessment.

The impact would be dramatic. The number of Ohio's 600+ districts earning a one-star rating would jump from nearly 50 to 250; under the revised scoring framework, the increase is projected to be less significant – from 48 to 62. The number of districts earning five-star ratings would decrease from 33 to 18.

"We want to continue to make sure that we have high expectations for students, but we don't want to end up in a situation just based on a technical change where everybody is sort of thrown into those lowest categories" (with no actual change in performance), DEW's chief integration officer, Dr. Chris Woolard, said at the agency's most recent public meeting.

## House advances Aspen Runnels' Law

The Ohio House of Representatives recently passed legislation (H.B. 203) to increase the penalties for vehicular manslaughter and vehicular assault resulting from speeding or the commission of other traffic offenses in an active school zone.

The bill – which honors Aspen Dylan Runnels, a 15-year-old Ohio student tragically killed last year after being struck by a truck in a school zone crosswalk – would also authorize courts to double fines for certain traffic offenses that occur in a school adjacent sector.

The House Judiciary Committee amended the bill to remove mandatory prison sentences for offenders and add language giving courts discretion to impose sentences aligned with the appropriate felony degree. The amended bill also makes enhanced penalties and increased fines permissive rather than mandatory.

Committee members also discussed legislation (H.B. 690) which grants school crossing guards authority to direct, stop or otherwise control traffic to help ensure pedestrian safety and which creates two new offenses related to interactions with school crossing guards performing official duties.

House Bill 203, passed unanimously by the lower chamber, moves to the Senate for its consideration. Deliberations continue in the House on H.B. 690.



## ODNR provides classroom resources

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) provides customizable activities and digital resources for classrooms.

Students can learn about scenic trails, rich geography, diverse ecosystems and fascinating historical landmarks while staying physically active through customizable activities with the Ohio Buckeye Trail Guide. The guide allows students to "hike" Ohio's legendary 1,440-mile Buckeye Trail and provides educational and customizable activities about trail towns, Ohio's nature and geography, and more. Poster-size maps to visually track class steps as they explore the trail from the classroom are also available.

[Click here](#) to access these dynamic resources.

