



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Media contacts at end of release

### **Education groups express concerns about proposal to merge ODE with other agencies**

COLUMBUS — Three statewide education management organizations today reacted to the news that the Ohio House of Representatives will consider legislation to combine the Ohio Department of Education with the Ohio Department of Higher Education and the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation. The Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA), the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) and the Ohio Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) expressed several initial concerns with the proposal.

"The Ohio Department of Education is responsible for carrying out the public education policy changes and laws passed every year by the Ohio General Assembly," said BASA Executive Director Kirk Hamilton. "But for us, the more important responsibility of the department is its service to the 650-plus school districts, educational service centers and joint vocational school districts. Moving to a model where the unique needs of kindergarten through 12th grade students are lost within an expanded bureaucracy would cause us great concern."

"One important service to school districts is the implementation of Ohio's complicated and under-funded school-funding system," said OASBO Executive Director Jim Rowan. "It is difficult to imagine how merging these varying interests will improve that process."

"The Ohio Department of Education is not without its shortcomings but given the downsizing and increased responsibilities that have occurred over the past decade, that is not surprising. This, coupled with the rapid changes we often see in public education policy mandated by the Ohio General Assembly, can result in frustration by our members. However, our experience in working with department staff to resolve issues and questions from the field is typically very positive."

OSBA Executive Director Richard Lewis said, "This new House proposal would undermine the role and authority of the elected members of the State Board of Education. By stripping it of all but its regulatory role, the board would no longer be acting in any significant way on behalf of the citizens the members represent. At the core of our existence is the notion that education in Ohio will be at its best when the interests of the people are served through publicly elected boards. The State Board of Education is no exception."

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“If better cooperation among these three departments is the goal, we urge lawmakers to look for less drastic measures that do not take away the department of education’s focus on serving Ohio’s public school districts and their students,” Lewis added. “There are numerous examples where these organizations have collaborated successfully in the past, and there is no reason to think those examples cannot be extended to other areas of work.

“We believe that the goals of this bill can be accomplished without the merger of these departments. We also believe that under Superintendent of Public Instruction Paolo DeMaria, the education department has shown a commitment to working through problems that schools face. In some cases, a lack of resources is the source of the problem.

“The proposal would move decisions about important topics such as setting the state’s learning standards, graduation requirements for students and school district report cards to a politically appointed staff as opposed to the current process that includes many opportunities for public input. An additional source for concern about the House proposal is the uncertainty it could mean for school districts when administrations change.”

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