

February 28, 2011
To The Editor:

Two weeks ago I, along with Superintendent of Schools, Doug Heuer and Board of Education President, Eric Coble, were participants in a first of its kind national conference in Denver on how to improve student achievement through labor-management collaboration. Representatives of 150 school districts from throughout the US attended this event sponsored by the US Department of Education, the National School Boards Association, The American Association of School Administrators, the NEA, The AFT and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. The purpose of this conference was to expand the nationwide movement to improve labor management collaboration using collective bargaining as the engine to effective school reform. One week later I was in Columbus testifying on proposed legislation (Senate Bill 5) that will, if enacted, destroy these relationships that have been so effective throughout our state and nation. Simply put, S.B. 5 is bad public policy; here is why I believe this to be true:

- This bill makes teachers and public employees 2nd class citizens by denying them the same rights that other unionized employees have such as negotiating health care benefits.
- Passage of S.B. 5 will cause a decline in the quality of education as teachers will leave the state and the profession. Charter Schools which have no collective bargaining are a good example of low achieving schools with high rates of teacher turnover. The vast majority of Ohio's charter schools are in academic watch or academic emergency.
- The replacement of salary schedules with some yet-to-be defined merit pay system will be a disaster and lead to litigation, and destroy the morale of teachers and school support staff. The salary schedules in school districts throughout Ohio have been in place long before collective bargaining. These salary systems, some of which have 20 or 25 annual steps, were designed to keep teachers and school support staff underpaid. Merit pay is nothing more than a red herring in the business of education and where it has been tried; there is no evidence of any improvement in student achievement. Please know that we are open to looking at alternative methods of teacher compensation and evaluation that consider multiple and valid measures of teacher performance.
- More and more school districts have entered into successful collaborative labor-management relationships in recent years. S.B. 5 destroys that progress and will create more labor strife. Strikes were much more common before the collective bargaining law.
- Consider what collective bargaining has accomplished in Ohio. In recent years we have negotiated concessions, healthcare changes, with districts to help maintain solvency. Our unions provide the capacity to help our districts move forward during arguably the worst economic times.
- Most importantly, teachers will lose the ability to safeguard students if they lose their say in promoting meaningful school reform, maintaining appropriate class sizes, student discipline, and in attracting the very best teachers. Who will consider teaching as a career if there is no way to advance oneself and earn fair compensation?

Senate Bill 5 will harm families and crumble communities across Ohio by killing jobs and eliminating the many critical services as well as the strong, sound education our children deserve.

Our state legislators need to shift their focus to creating jobs and strengthening our schools and communities. Please contact your state senators and representatives and urge them to vote NO on Senate Bill 5.

Tom Schmida, President