

Testimony on HB 5016 and 5017
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As a 20+ year teacher who has been following education policy in recent years, I am hoping the Education Subcommittee members and Co-chairs will take to heart some concerns I have regarding your deliberations on the State School Fund and Department of Education budget.

Regarding the ODE budget:

I reviewed the large packet on OLIS regarding the ODE's budget for its operations. If I am interpreting this correctly, I see reductions in areas that are supposedly priorities. Is this because money is being shifted out of the Department to other people doing similar work through the OEIB umbrella?

For example, the ODE just expanded its Equity Unit. A State ELL Plan was developed and I attended input meetings and presentations. There are many wonderful things in the plan, especially its commitment to the search for best practices. On the other hand the OEIB's version of equity is to reduce services to vulnerable populations. At the very least, someone needs to answer the question of how to get back to the ODE's vision, with the focus of to help and not to punish. And it would be a money saver, which will help the budget.

I would assume there are current ODE employees working on most if not all the topics covered under the OEIB's agenda. So why have we created another needless layer of bureaucracy when we have people already working?

Regarding the State School Fund:

I think you should decide on a number that is dedicated to the fund, with no carve outs. Each carve out reduces the services to students who are not the targets of initiatives. This results in larger class sizes and a less comprehensive curriculum. Please fund the so-called unfunded mandates before adding new programs. Some of these unfunded mandates include the new PE requirement and full-day kindergarten. If there are pet projects that need to be funded, they should have to compete with all the others jockeying for position for available monies.

I watched in horror as the early learning people lined up to get their piece of the carve out and willing to embrace Saxton's new idea of a standardized pedagogy where we will make sure teachers are all teaching the same way. When a member of the committee asked him what about students that learn differently, he responded by saying they still have to teach the same way but you are free to do interventions as you please. The last I checked, we have no staff for such interventions. This reminds me of the evil way the federal government gives us money with strings attached. Why we would engage in the same behavior that we criticize is beyond my comprehension.

Under no circumstances should we be giving money to community organizations out of the State School Fund when those same services, if funded, could be provided by the schools themselves. That's my definition of seamless.