



## Week of November 18, 2024

### **Matt Huffman to be next House Speaker, McColley to lead Senate**

The legislative slate is in place for 2025 and 2026, pending an official vote in early January. An unexpected announcement this week from incumbent House Speaker **Jason Stephens** who opted to drop out of the speaker's race paved the way for term-limited Senate President **Matt Huffman** to lead the House when he joins the chamber as a freshman in January. Below is the leadership composition of both chambers.

#### **House Republicans:**

Speaker: Matt Huffman  
Speaker Pro Tempore: Gayle Manning  
Assistant Speaker Pro Tempore: Phil Plummer  
Majority Floor Leader: Marilyn John  
Assistant Majority Floor Leader: Adam Bird  
Majority Whips: Nick Santucci, Steve Demetriou, Josh Williams, and Riordan McClain

#### **Senate Republicans:**

President: Rob McColley  
President Pro Tempore: Bill Reineke  
Majority Floor Leader: Theresa Gavarone  
Majority Whip: George Lang

#### **House Democrats:**

Minority Leader: Allison Russo  
Assistant Minority Leader: Dontavius Jarrells  
Minority Whip: Dani Isaacsohn  
Assistant Minority Whip: Michele Grim

#### **Senate Democrats:**

Minority Leader: Nickie Antonio  
Assistant Minority Leader: Hearcel Craig  
Minority Whip: Kent Smith  
Assistant Minority Whip: Beth Liston

### **House committee slashes testing provisions from private school accountability bill**

A proposal to require private school voucher students take the same tests as public school students underwent significant revisions this week, including removing the aforementioned requirement. [House Bill \(HB\) 407](#), sponsored by Reps. **Gayle Manning** and **Bill Seitz**, was revised in committee to eliminate the bill's same-test requirement and the state funds expenditure requirement, among other provisions.

Despite these changes, school choice organizations – including the Fordham Institute and the Ohio Alliance for Independent Schools, who previously opposed the bill for those items – maintained their opposition to the new version of the bill. Americans for Prosperity, a powerful lobbying group, opposes the current version of the bill and has marked it as a key bill. For the bill to clear the committee, it is likely that the measure must undergo another round of changes.

### **Committees prep bills for movement, others for more one-and-done hearings**

- HB 279 – House committee passage of the bill on the school bus safety grant program and safety enhancements. A Senate companion bill received a first hearing this week, indicating potential enactment this year
- HB 571 – House committee passage of the bill that requires the inclusion of the national suicide and crisis lifeline telephone number on student ID cards, student planners, and electronic portals
- HB 310 – a new version of the bill was adopted that creates the Military Veteran Educators Retirement

Assistance Fund to provide financial assistance to educators with military service

- HB 432 – a third hearing for the CTE licensure flexibility, teeing it up for forthcoming amendments
- SB 208 – another hearing on the mandated open enrollment policy for military families, which appears to be headed for enactment this session
- HJR 6 and HB 402 – a sponsor testimony on the two proposals that would limit property tax increases
- HB 579 – sponsor testimony on a proposal that would allow townships to levy a tax to pay for SROs
- HB 583 – a substitute version accepted that would require districts to assess the needs of a foster child for appropriate services and interventions
- HB 387 – a proposal that would eliminate academic distress commissions
- HB 485 – a proposal regarding school internet safety, cell phones, and social media <sup>[SEP]</sup>
- HB 520 – a proposal to allow students to use club sports to fulfill the statutory physical education requirement.

### **Required OTC drug policy on its way to DeWine**

HB 70, which requires public school districts and private schools to adopt a policy on the use of over-the-counter drugs, is on its way to Gov. Mike DeWine for his signature. The Senate passed the measure by a vote of 30-1 on Wednesday without making changes to the House bill, thus bypassing an otherwise required House concurrence vote.

### **Debate continues on “LifeWise bill”**

This week also featured testimony on of the companion bills – [SB 293](#) – to require, rather than permit, school districts adopt policies to allow students to be released from school for religious instruction during school hours.

### **Sen. Kirk Schuring, longtime legislator, dies**

Sen. **Kirk Schuring**, a 31-year veteran of the Ohio House and Senate, passed away Friday due to health issues. Serving the 29th Senate District, which encompasses most of Stark County, Schuring was a well-liked, well-respected, and hardworking legislator, earning praise and accolades from colleagues and interest groups on all sides of the political spectrum. The Senate will fill the vacancy at a future date.

### **STRS temporarily adjusts retirement age, installs interim leader**

The board of trustees of the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) last week temporarily allowed teachers to retire with full benefits after 33 years of service instead of 34 years for a three-year period, in effect from June 2025 through July 2027. Meanwhile, the board on Thursday appointed **Aaron Hood** to serve as STRS’ interim executive director upon current interim Lynn Hoover’s retirement at the end of the year. Hood currently serves as a finance senior fellow at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

### **Heard around the Statehouse**

“For us, we need them to get into a real education, and a real education is a Christian education.” - **Aaron Baer**, president of the Center for Christian Virtue, [a powerful Conservative religious lobbying organization](#).

“If (House Bill 407) was about a level playing field, you might hear advocates argue that once these changes are made private school choice should be funded equitably. I missed that in their testimony. If it was about parent rights, you’d see them drop the lawsuit challenging the legality of the EdChoice Scholarship program. That hasn’t happened.” – **Chad Aldis** of the Fordham Institute, [arguing against the accountability and transparency provisions of House Bill 407](#).

