



## Week of December 9, 2024

### **Education bills in play as final week approaches**

With less than one week remaining in the current legislative session, state lawmakers continue to try to find viable paths forward on key education bills, including the Parents Bill of Rights ([House Bill 8](#)), religious release time ([HB 445](#)), school bus safety ([HB 279](#), [HB 518](#), and [SB 329](#)), expanded expulsion authority ([HB 206](#)), not to mention property tax relief. Lawmakers will return for committee meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday next week, culminating in two separate several-hours-long Wednesday sessions that very well could extend into the early hours of Thursday. Several of these bills, including the Parents Bill of Rights, religious release time, and property tax relief will likely be negotiating items between the House and Senate as the session nears a close.

### **“LifeWise bill” added to Parents Bill of Rights**

[HB 8](#), the Parents Bill of Rights, was amended this week to include the religious release time provisions from [HB 445](#), also known as the “LifeWise bill.” Such a move complicates HB 8’s future as House Speaker **Jason Stephens** has recently reiterated his desire for a “clean” HB 8, which is also a House priority bill. Nevertheless, the Senate Education Committee is scheduled to meet Tuesday afternoon to vote on HB 8, which would be followed by a Wednesday Senate vote and a potential House concurrence vote that same day.

The committee on Tuesday is also set to act on [HB 206](#), which would allow superintendents to expel students for up to 180 days for actions that pose “imminent and severe endangerment” to the health and safety of other students or school employees. There is a chance this bill could be the vehicle for the religious release time and other changes, including pupil transportation modifications and revisions to the state’s automatic school closure policy for public and charter schools.

### **House sends Senate education omnibus bill**

In its last meeting of the current biennium, the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee passed [SB 208](#), which pertains to open enrollment policies for children of active-duty military families. Prior to passage, the committee added the following provisions:

- allowing a student to continue to attend the district and receive transportation services for the remainder of the school year if the student’s parent is discharged or released from active duty;
- allows a pre-service teacher permit to be for one year in duration, in addition to three years as under continuing law;
- eliminating provisions regarding required instruction on proper interactions with peace officers
- permitting, rather than requiring, public schools to have law enforcement officers or prosecutors with relevant experience provide employee in-service training on child sexual abuse, thus expanding the pool of eligible individuals who can provide the training;
- requiring districts and ESCs to “seek to meet the varying and unique needs of students and teachers” when purchasing technological office equipment;
- requiring districts to consider the long-term cost of ownership, flexibility for innovation, and any anticipated residual or salvage value at the end of the target life cycle when purchasing technological office equipment;

- establishing the Prenatal-to-Five Early Childhood to Post- Secondary Regional Partnerships Program to support early childhood to post-secondary regional partnerships throughout Ohio; and
- exempting home education learning pods from child care regulations.

A concurrence vote on [SB 208](#) is expected next week.

### **SB 29 fix signed into law**

Gov. Mike DeWine on Dec. 9 signed into law long-sought fixes to [SB 29](#). Those fixes, contained in [HB 432](#), are accompanied by licensure flexibilities or career-technical educators. The fixes, as well as the full bill itself, go into immediate effect.

### **Heard around the Statehouse**

"HB 8 is one of our priority bills. We could have easily loaded it up with a lot of other things on our side, but we wanted to make a clear, clean statement that parents have the right to know what's going on in schools with their children and that's pretty much it." - House Speaker **Jason Stephens**, anticipating a Senate effort to add seemingly controversial provisions to HB 8, a House priority bill.

"Extraordinarily complex things that haven't had much discussion that have huge ramifications monetarily and into the future, we're not going to be able to do that in seven or eight days. So, I'd like to take the findings of the property tax committee and use those to draft legislation for the first six months of next year." - Senate President **Matt Huffman**, speaking to reporters regarding the prospect of property tax reform or relief in 2024.

"They're talking about eliminating the federal Department of Education. They should do that. It's a huge waste of money. It's absolutely zero value added to people in K-12. What it does do is give a lot of congressmen the opportunity to say, 'We have \$50 million for helping kids read. Here's some money. We're going to shovel it on top of this other money. And we don't know whether it's really helping kids read, but we can say we did something.' So, it's a waste of money and it often gets in the way of people who are really trying to make a difference." - Senate President **Matt Huffman**, commenting on a proposal to eliminate or reduce the U.S. Department of Education.

"All the nice things I'm about to say about Matt Huffman are revoked and void as of Jan. 6." - Sen. **Rob McColley** in a farewell speech to outgoing Senate President Huffman who becomes House Speaker in January. McColley succeeds Huffman as President of the Senate in January.

"You have dethroned the current speaker of the House: Allison Russo." - Democrat Sen. **Kent Smith**, in a farewell speech to President Huffman.