



Senator Peggy Lehner
6th Ohio Senate District

Guest Column

June 20, 2011

Contact: Elizabeth Walling
(614) 466-4538

REAL EDUCATION REFORM COMES TO OHIO

BY STATE SENATOR PEGGY LEHNER

In addition to closing a gaping multi-billion dollar shortfall, the new biennial budget bill also takes a serious step toward bringing true reform to Ohio's educational landscape.

It is often assumed that the education system in the United States is among the best in the world. Unfortunately the statistics tell us otherwise. We rank 17th among other industrialized nations for the number of students who graduate from High School and even lower (26th) for college graduation. On performance, the top 10% of our students do not test as well as the average students in many of the nations we compete against. We do rate 4th however in the amount of money we spend per student. Obviously we are not getting what we pay for.

It is these sobering facts that drive my interest in education and why I am pleased to serve as the Chairman of the Senate Education Committee. I was very encouraged during last week's budget process to see so many of my Senate colleagues join in the effort to make education reform in Ohio a priority- even in the midst of fixing a gaping multi-billion dollar budget deficit.

We spend far too much time fighting over where our children attend school and far too little attention to the effectiveness of the schools that they attend. Every child in Ohio should have access to a high quality education regardless of whether they attend a parochial, charter, e-school or traditional public school. There may be nothing more important that we can do as legislators than to assure that that happens.

This budget significantly bolsters the accountability standards for all schools, regardless of type. Public schools that chronically fall in the bottom 5 percentile on the performance index – whether charter or traditional public – will have to either be reconstituted (new faculty, new leaders) or be subject to closure. Teachers in failing schools who can not demonstrate command of their subject matter will be required to undergo additional training or face dismissal. Teachers and schools that demonstrate excellence will be recognized and rewarded.

In addition, I advocated for a number of provisions that will provide parents with more education choices for their children. We have begun to knock down the roadblocks that have prevented new charter schools from opening, we lifted the moratorium on new e-schools in Ohio, expanded the Ed Choice scholarship program and we created the special education scholarship that will

allow parents to decide the best setting for their child's special needs. However just as importantly

The reforms contained in this budget will not turn around test scores overnight or put an end to underperforming schools but it is a beginning. The actions taken by the Senate over the past month serve as a recommitment to the children and families of our great state. Now, as the budget bill makes its way into conference committee, I urge my friends in both legislative chambers to continue this good work and further secure a prosperous educational future for our young people.