

The Ohio Legislature Strikes Again – New Meaning to DRACONIAN

Tom Moscovic – Legislative Chair

Ohio HB322 and Ohio HB327

Ohio House Bills 322 and 327 have been introduced, which would restrict the teaching of certain concepts and topics in K-16 classrooms. HB 322 primarily targets public schools and state agencies, but the Ohio Department of Higher Education would be included under the definition of state agency. This bill prohibits public entities from requiring discussion of current events and prohibits the teaching of a list of topics dealing with race, sex, slavery, and bias. It also targets history and civics courses, discouraging the discussion of current events, controversial issues, or activities that involve social or policy advocacy. Moreover, the legislation specifies that teachers cannot be required to teach anything that goes against their "sincerely held religious or philosophical convictions."

HB 327 is slightly different and more punitive than HB 322. The bill prohibits public schools, state agencies, colleges, and universities from offering teaching, instruction, or training on "divisive concepts" or accepting private funding to promote such concepts. Violations of the bill would result in the withholding of funding to school districts or State Share of Instruction to colleges and universities. The bill has a list of concepts related to race, sex, nationality, color, and ethnicity that it defines as divisive and therefore prohibited. It does say that divisive or controversial concepts can be taught if done so objectively and impartially, but who gets to determine what is objective and impartial is unclear.

The Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS) firmly opposes both House Bill 322 and House Bill 327 for the following reasons:

These bills are contrary to the purpose of a social studies education. Passage of these bills would—whether out of real or perceived threat—stifle classroom discussions, impair critical thinking, dampen creativity, and impose restrictions on the very freedoms needed to obtain civic competency. The value of learning about issues and relevant topics from multiple perspectives would be severely compromised and even eliminated, having a disproportionate and undue impact on marginalized groups.

HB 322 and HB 327 would impose penalties on teaching standards required by the state of Ohio state and the College Board. Passage of these bills will hinder the ability of students to earn Advanced Placement (AP) credits and access college entrance.

These bills alternatively discourage (322) the discussion of anything “controversial” and outright prohibit “divisive” topics **(327)** or those that might cause one to “feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of an individual’s race or sex” **(322)** or that one by virtue of their nationality “bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same nationality.” **(327)** These limitations and prohibitions would in turn limit societal understanding to few viewpoints.

HB 322, 327 would not allow class credit for students who advocate for or against a particular public policy. Student engagement would diminish as student agency is eliminated.

A source of pride in Ohio--autonomous local school board decision making--would be severely diminished. These bills would handcuff college and university-based Ohio teacher preparation programs in their responsibility to meet accreditation standards. These bills contradict and prevent the execution of existing educational policies and norms.

HB 322 and HB 327 violate the democratic virtues classroom educators are expected to teach. They are hostile to a student’s legitimate social studies education.

HB#322

SUMMARY ♣ With respect to a course in history, civics, or a similar subject area, prohibits public schools and state agencies from (1) requiring the discussion of current events, (2) requiring or awarding course credit for lobbying or other work surrounding social or public policy advocacy, and (3) accepting private funding to develop curriculum, purchase course materials, or provide training. ♣ Prohibits a state agency or public school from teaching any administrator, teacher, staff, member, or employee to adopt or believe in any of the specified concepts. ♣ Prohibits the State Board of Education from adopting any model curriculum regarding specified concepts. ♣ Prohibits any teacher or school administrator or any employee of a public school or state agency from approving, making use of, or carrying out standards, curricula, lesson plans, textbooks, instructional materials, or instructional practices that serve to inculcate specified concepts.

HB#327

SUMMARY ♣ Prohibits school districts, community schools, STEM schools, state agencies, and state institutions of higher education from teaching “divisive concepts” or accepting private funding to further promotion of “divisive concepts.” ♣ Requires the Department of Education to withhold funding from a school district or school that violates the bill’s provisions until such time as the district or school complies. ♣ Requires the administrative head of each state agency to review its grant and training programs as well as ensure and encourage compliance with the bill’s provisions by its employees. ♣ Requires the Department of Administrative Services to adopt a policy that complies with the bill’s provisions and establish rules for the implementation and enforcement of that policy.

Suicide Concerns Among Young Students

Montgomery county, Ohio (WKEF) -- September is suicide prevention month, with children back in the classroom experts are concerned that the number of suicides will spike. “I would say checking in on your kids in terms of mental health, check in on their emotions,” said Hector Wong with Cincinnati children's hospital. Health officials say COVID-19 cases are now causing significant changes in schools and putting additional stress on children, “I think sometimes just a simple act of saying, How are you doing, let's talk about it can go a long way,” said Wong. Last September kids were learning remotely- but this year things are different Dayton 24/7 Now’s Mamie Bah asked Samantha Elder with Montgomery County alcohol, drug addiction & mental health services, “are there any concerns there that there may be a spike in the number of suicides in young children?” Elder said, “In the fourth quarter of 2020 death by suicide was actually the number one cause of death for children in Ohio, in the age range about 10 to 14 years of age. so, we are definitely taking a close look at that as we are headed back to school because there is the potential for a spike.” In 2020 Montgomery County Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Services saw at least a 50 % increase in young people taking their lives. Experts say it’s important to reassure your kid with so much changing. “Something else that's really important is for parents to validate their feelings, it's important for parents to stay calm and remain positive let kids know that it's okay not to always feel ok, something else is setting the tone, parents should answer questions about calm, if possible,” said Elder. Bottom line parents need to be alert, “the mental health impact of this pandemic on kids is under appreciated by many bits, it's as big a factor is to the effects of the virus,” said Wong. Experts say focus on the positives with your kid by getting them to talk about the good.