

Legislative Priorities for 2020

By Daniel G. Hilson & Alex Thomas

The Roetzel legislative team has been busy working on three (3) policy issues, which are poised for reform in 2020.

Academic Distress Commission (ADC) Reform

The Roetzel legislative team has led the charge for recognizing verifiable academic improvement. With over (18) months of continued advocacy, the legislature is close to adopting meaningful reform. Below are the most recent legislative draft proposals:

- (a) Dissolution of the three (3) existing ADCs in Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland;
- (b) State financial support along with targeted and district-coordinated early intervention strategies for academically struggling school districts;
- (c) An extended timeline (5 years) for districts to implement improvement strategies;
- (d) Incentives for utilizing proven school improvement experts to include peer-to-peer modeling;
- (e) Restoration of collective bargaining rights for struggling districts while identifying and reforming any Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA) impediments to improve academic performance.

We believe ADC reform legislation is close to an agreement and should be adopted in Spring of 2020.

Report Card Reform

The report card study committee released its findings on December 16, 2019 as required by H.B. 166. While some members of the committee wanted to make specific recommendations, the report, more or less, described the testimony of several witnesses. The Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) provided comprehensive testimony with several recommended changes. A subgroup of the Ohio 8 Coalition also provided extensive changes to include the alignment of the report card with the Ohio Department of Education's strategic plan for education. The adoption of either organization's plan will require separate legislation. While most education advocacy groups are pushing for considerable change, there will probably only be minor changes taking place in 2020. No significant reform is likely to happen until the next general assembly.

EDChoice Grants

The State has seen explosive growth in the availability of EdChoice vouchers due, in part, to changes adopted in the biennial budget bill, H.B. 166. Any student assigned to a building with low or failing marks on one (1) of several measures, is eligible for an EdChoice voucher. Ohio is the

only State that funds its EdChoice voucher program by deducting the funds from specific school districts. Many advocacy groups, including some who are proponents of EdChoice, believe the district deduction method needs to be addressed or modified. We believe this issue will be addressed in early 2020.

The Roetzel state government affairs team has represented two coalitions of Ohio school districts since 2018. Roetzel has worked with both groups to ensure their point of view has full representation in the Statehouse and that their role in serving Ohio's youth is recognized and understood by policymakers. Roetzel's team has engaged legislators and administration officials on several education issues over the last 24 months. The team feels it is critical that elected officials understand the effects of policies including Academic Distress Commissions, the expansion of EdChoice vouchers, and the State Report Card on the districts in these coalitions. Please contact any of the listed professionals if you have any questions or would like to speak to us about advocacy.

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