

Legislator gives group scoop on H.B. 373

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One of the sponsors of a bill aimed at requiring schools to impose healthy choices on students squared off last week at a meeting of the North Side Health Advisory Committee with a board of education member, although it wasn't much of a debate.



John Carney

State Rep. John Patrick Carney of Clintonville, one of the leading proponents for House Bill 373, which establishes the "Healthy Choices for Healthy Children Council" to implement requirements for more physical activity and better snack choices in school vending machines, was the guest speaker for the monthly meeting of the panel.

The committee was formed by Columbus Public Health officials with a goal of identifying health issues initially in the Northland area and eventually throughout the North Side.

Also on hand at last week's meeting was Mike Wiles, now in his first term on the Columbus school board after several previous unsuccessful bids for the office.

During his presentation on H.B. 373, which has Republican co-sponsors in the House and a Senate sponsor of a dual measure, Carney, a Democrat, conceded that some school groups have expressed concerns about the proposed law.

They question how it's going to be possible to fit 30 minutes of physical activity into an already crowded daily schedule for students, Carney said, although he added that this already is being met in some districts, including Columbus.

"Children were not meant to sit for six hours a day," said Carney, who also is a health care attorney.

School officials view other aspects of H.B. 373 as that most dreaded of legislative actions, the unfunded mandate, Carney admitted.

Requirements for establishing a body mass index and weight-status screening program, with the results being sent home to parents, fall into this category. Another requirement would add an additional half unit of physical education for students to graduate high school starting in 2014.

The bill would eliminate the authority of school district officials in excusing from physical education classes students who participate in athletics, marching band or cheerleading.

Passage of the bill, which Carney said should be out of committee by the middle of May, would put Ohio in the forefront nationally in terms of focusing on the health needs of young people.

"It would be probably one of the most forward-thinking health bills in the United States, if not the most forward-thinking," he said.

When it came his time to question Carney, Wiles focused primarily on a portion of the bill that would permit students to eat breakfast in the classroom if they don't arrive in school in enough time to eat in a

cafeteria.

Overall, Wiles said, he's in favor of the 30 minutes of physical activity mandated by H.B. 373.

The function of the health council, according to Carney, would be to identify best practices for implementing the requirements of the law and to make it as flexible as possible.

The Ohio Legislative Services Commission's report on the bill included these notations:

"According to the Ohio Department of Education, nine additional staff members may need to be hired at an annual cost of \$765,000 if the bill's requirement to determine compliance with food and beverage standards necessitates site visits to every school.

"ODE may incur costs ranging from minimal to approximately \$6-million depending on whether an existing physical fitness assessment is used or a new one tailored to Ohio's standards is developed for the performance indicator required by the bill.

"ODE may incur administrative costs in implementing various requirements of the bill including establishing a clearinghouse, creating a list of resources for parents and issuing an annual report.

"Subject to General Assembly appropriations, state expenditures may increase by approximately \$1.4-million per year, based on FY 2009 costs, to provide free breakfasts to children eligible for reduced-price breakfasts under federal guidelines. The bill does not make these appropriations."

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