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# Oroho/Pennacchio/Schepisi: State Board of Education Should Focus More on Learning Loss, Less on Identity Politics

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## Gender Identity on State Board's Agenda Again with New Proposal Impacting Sex Ed Classes

Senate Republican Leader Steven Oroho, Senator Joe Pennacchio, and Senator Holly Schepisi said the State Board of Education should focus more on addressing pandemic-related learning loss and less on identity politics in response to the Board's newly released agenda for its December meeting. The Board also should be more transparent and accessible, the senators said.



Sen. Steven Oroho, Sen. Joe Pennacchio, and Sen. Holly Schepisi said the State Board of Education should focus more on addressing pandemic-related learning loss and less on identity politics. ([Flickr](#))

"It's shocking that the State Board of Education remains focused on identity politics when we know New Jersey students are far behind where they should be due to pandemic-related learning loss," said Oroho (R-24). "Instead of coming up with a plan to help students get caught up, the State Board continues its march to infuse gender identity and progressive politics into every aspect of our children's education. They should put as much effort into helping students

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get better at reading, writing, and math.”

The Board’s agenda for its December meeting includes several items, including a proposal for [“Managing for Equality and Equity in Education,”](#) which, among other things, replaces mentions of “equality” with “equity” and “achievement gap” with “opportunity gap” in State regulations.

The senators said those provisions are an explicit acknowledgment that the State Board of Education cares more about boosting certain groups, regardless of individual educational needs, at the expense of efforts to ensure good outcomes for every student.

The State Board’s Equality and Equity proposal would also change State regulations to prevent schools from separating boys and girls for certain portions of sex education classes, instead allowing students to be separated for those lessons based on their gender identity.

“It seems ridiculous that the State Board of Education thinks it’s appropriate to include boys who identify as girls in sex education classes where girls are taught about feminine hygiene and menstruation,” said Pennacchio (R-26). “It also doesn’t make sense that girls who identify as boys might miss those lessons that could be important to helping them maintain their physical health. This is another effort by extremists to force their politics into our classrooms at the expense of our kids’ education and well-being.”

The senators also expressed concern that the State Board of Education continues to not be transparent in an apparent effort to prevent people from challenging the misguided policies that it seeks to advance.

They noted that the [meeting notice](#) and [agenda](#) for the Board’s upcoming meeting on December 7 were not issued publicly until December 5, just two days before the meeting, despite being backdated to December 2.

The December 7 meeting notice states that the Board will only accept written testimony on one agenda item addressing bilingual education. As with every meeting since April of 2020, the meeting will be held virtually with no opportunity for concerned parents to address board members directly.

“As an appointed body that’s not accountable to voters, it’s clear that the majority of State Board of Education members don’t care that parents are being excluded from the process of updating important education policies that impact their kids,” said Schepisi (R-39). “The Board hides its agendas until the last minute and then its members hide behind their computers with virtual hearings that either take no public testimony or only accept written testimony. Concerned parents have every right to be heard.”

To address those concerns, Schepisi announced the introduction of legislation today requiring the State Board of Education to provide a minimum of five days’ notice of a public meeting of the board. The bill, [S-3384](#), also requires that members of the public be permitted to provide public comment on all agenda items of a public meeting that are not addressed in executive session.

Additionally, Oroho and Senator Jean Stanfield (R-8) [recently introduced legislation](#), S-3299,

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that requires meetings of the State Board of Education to be accessible to the public both in person and virtually. Their bill, which is co-sponsored by Pennacchio, Schepisi, and other Senate Republicans, also allows the public to testify both in person and virtually.

“Since the start of the pandemic, parents have been denied a voice in education policy by the Murphy administration and the State Board of Education,” Oroho concluded. “Senate Republicans are fighting to give it back.”