

New Ohio legislation targets diversity programs in K-12 education

By **Laura Hancock**
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COLUMBUS, Ohio - An Ohio Senate bill would ban diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in Ohio's traditional public, charter and STEM schools.

[Senate Bill 113](#) would prohibit schools from continuing or establishing DEI departments or offices, from using DEI in job descriptions, from requiring DEI training, or from contracting with consultants whose role would be promoting or hiring diverse people.

The bill also requires schools to establish complaint processes to hear student, parent or employee grievances about violations of the DEI ban.

The bill comes as legislation barring DEI at the college level also progresses in the General Assembly, [having passed](#) the Ohio Senate less than a month after it was introduced.

At the federal level, President Donald Trump has issued several executive orders banning DEI and instructing schools to give students a "patriotic" education. This has Ohio's colleges assessing their programs, and in some cases, [cutting them](#).

State Sen. Andrew Brenner, a Delaware County Republican who is sponsoring the legislation, said Tuesday afternoon during legislative testimony that the focus on equity undermines people's hard work and merit.

"DEI does not stand for diversity, equity and inclusion," Brenner said. "It stands for division, exclusion and indoctrination. It is unconstitutional, unfair and directly contradicts the vision of Martin Luther King Jr. And we must stand against these policies and ensure that our schools teach students to rise based on their abilities, not their racial identity."

This led to a clash with state Sen. Catherine Ingram, a Cincinnati Democrat, who challenged Brenner's understanding of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

Brenner "believes that Martin Luther King said this is to be merit," she said. "And what he said was he had a dream that one day, one day, not then and certainly not now, that we are equitable... Unfortunately for a very long time, certain groups of people started far behind the starting line."

Brenner replied that, "DEI is really about a redistribution of wealth, period. It does put people in classes. That is clearly obvious from everything that is going on in higher ed and in K-12. And what it's doing is saying some people are privileged and some other people are not, and you must recognize that. And regardless of whether or not we are working hard... it's trying to do is trying to redistribute wealth and come out with an equal outcome."

Brenner said he believed King was asking society to give everyone an opportunity "to advance and become successful and live on their own and be able to raise a family and not be harassed over things."

State Sen. Kent Smith, a Euclid Democrat, said he was concerned the hyperfocus on DEI would cause harm. Sometimes, districts look for a disabled athlete to coach an [adaptive track and field team](#), which the Ohio High School Athletic Association deemed a sport in 2013, he said.

"So my concern is that in this effort to clear DEI out of public schools, whether or not we're going to inadvertently hurt populations that perhaps you hadn't considered," he said.