

# House, Senate K-12 Attendance Measures May Merge

Senate-passed legislation requiring public schools to allow students to miss up to three days for religious observances could see an amendment incorporating a House plan on a similar topic.

[Rep. Adam Bird](#) (R-Cincinnati), chair of the [House Primary & Secondary Education](#) Track Committee, said in an interview he sees the former measure ([SB 49](#) Track) as a likely landing spot for a bill ([HB 135](#) Track) requiring school districts to excuse students for 4-H and Future Farmers of America programs.

"It's my goal to see that out of committee and have a bill that the Senate would concur on," he said.

SB49, which is sponsored by [Sen. Michele Reynolds](#) (R-Canal Winchester) and passed the Senate unanimously last April, previously picked up changes in the House K-12 committee that would:

- Change the definition of chronic absenteeism so it no longer includes excused absences.
- Not count excused absences toward habitual truancy or excessive absenteeism until a student has more than 60 hours of excused absences.
- Provide a list of absences that must be considered a "legitimate excuse" for absences.
- Update the state's graduation rate formula so schools and districts are not penalized when students on individualized educational plans defer graduation.

HB135, which is led by [Rep. Rodney Creech](#) (R-W. Alexandria) and [Rep. Thomas Hall](#) (R-Middletown), has received three committee hearings, the last of which took place last June.

Bird said he expects the combined bill to exit his committee "for sure by June, if we're going to be productive."

The House K-12 chair said he also intends to continue to vet a Senate-passed measure ([SB 162](#) Track) that would require schools to provide additional help to students identified as limited proficiency in math or reading, along with a controversial plan ([SB 168](#) Track) that would loosen certain administrator and educator licensure requirements to aid schools with staffing challenges.

"I want to give those a fair hearing," he said.

Bird said his committee in April will likely bring in opponents to testify on a bill ([HB 339 Track](#)) that would extend funding to parents who send their children to private religious schools that have declined state financial support in exchange for less regulation.

That proposal regarding so-called nonchartered nonpublic schools has drawn fairness and implementation concerns from sponsor [Rep. Gary Click's](#) (R-Vickery) Democratic and Republican colleagues on the panel. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, February 13, 2024](#))

"I'm not saying that it's going to pass," Bird said. "I can't even tell you there are eight Republican votes in committee for that yet, but we are going to give it its due diligence."

Bird said HB339 could see a substitute bill at a future hearing, which he said likely would drive further conversations among lawmakers and the public.