

Hello, Members of the Senate Education Committee,

At Students for Better Schools & Futures at Ohio State University, we strive to bring students' voices to the center of policies governing K-12 education in Ohio. This often-silenced group is undeniably frustrated with the state of schooling. Students want to act, in much the same way as the lawmakers on this committee, to create an education better than they received.

But Senate Bill 1 is not the answer.

Public education implicates the taxpayer and should be held to the highest standards of public input. Senate Bill 1 wants to eliminate this fundamental dimension of democratic decision-making. Seeking to reform the woes of education governance, Senate Bill 1 threw out the merits of the Ohio State Board of Education — its ample opportunities for political engagement and direct lines of dialogue between the legislator and legislated — in favor of reinforcing the bureaucratic procedures behind the errors we see in current decision-making.

The participation structure within the State Board of Education is not perfect – our group exists to correct the vast disenfranchisement of the young, of which the State Board is often guilty — but Senate Bill 1 does nothing to strengthen participation, placing important issues of curriculum, education standards, and standardized testing in a structure with no direct lines to public comment.

Undoubtedly, education is a battleground. Between constant culture war bills and resolutions to budgetary discussions around the Fair School Funding Plan, we must recognize that our power, as well as our only path forward, lies in inclusive and expansive public participation. Nothing is solved by blocking communication between students, community members, and their legislators, as Senate Bill 1 proposes.

Additionally, there is the matter of taxpayer resources allocated between classrooms and administration. With Senate Bill 1's expansion of the Department of Education to include three additional senior administrative positions and two additional departments, we must consider the costs. Besides the increased staffing needs of dividing education governance across the State Board of Education and the new Department of Education and Workforce, operation costs are doubled. Senate Bill 1 would necessitate two separate IT, HR, and general maintenance departments — with the added difficulty of communication and collaboration across these entities. In almost-doubling government operating costs, Senate Bill 1 increases expenditure on education, and these funds never see a classroom or student.

At Students for Better Schools & Futures, we witness student outrage and interest in persuading school policy daily. We also see suppression with lacking opportunities for political participation, as well as structures that simultaneously demean youth voices for their lack of lived experience and devalue the insight of their recent time in Ohio schools.

We urge you to vote against Senate Bill 1 — for the democratic virtue of political participation, for better Ohio schools created with and through public input, and for taxpayer dollars servicing students' everyday learning across the state of Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today,

Students for Better Schools & Futures