



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON FY26-27 BIENNIAL
BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today on the State Board of Education's (SBOE) Fiscal Years 2026-2027 operating budget requests. My name is Paul Craft, and I am the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The State Board of Education is committed to providing trusted and professional support to Ohio's schools, staff, and students as an important part of Ohio's educational infrastructure. There is no more important duty than ensuring that each of Ohio's more than 1.6 million students interact every day with well-qualified educators who display high levels of moral character and judgment.

In late 2023, due to language in House Bill 33 in the 135th General Assembly, the SBOE separated from the Ohio Department of Education taking on a more focused role in Ohio's educational system. I want to take just a moment to highlight the role of the SBOE team and the work that is being done daily to assist educators and students.

One of the larger roles of the SBOE is to provide licenses to teachers, administrators, coaches, and others working in a school setting. There are currently 509,693 credentials issued to 370,278 educators in Ohio. The SBOE issues, on average, 138,666 licenses per year and brings in an average of \$11,650,000 to the teacher licensure fund (4L20). The SBOE also oversees the Ohio Assessments for Educators (OAE), designed to evaluate the knowledge and skills of individuals seeking initial educator licensure in Ohio. Under Ohio Revised Code 3319.22, the SBOE handles adopting these assessments, setting the passing scores, and considering recommendations from the Educator Standards Board.

The SBOE Office of Professional Conduct (OPC) administers the ethical standards for educators. The office investigates allegations involving criminal violations or conduct unbecoming of the educator's position to ensure that all Ohio students receive instruction from educators committed to a safe, supportive, and healthy school community. In 2019, OPC received 13,160 referrals. In 2023, that number rose to 22,066, which is a 68% increase in a four-year period.

Another important aspect of the work of OPC is to monitor and alert individuals and schools to hits in the Retained Applicant Fingerprint Database (Rapback) system.

The Rapback system alerts OPC when an individual who regularly interacts with students is arrested, enters a guilty plea, or is convicted of a criminal offense. As of April 8, 2025, the SBOE has 463,670 individuals enrolled in the Rapback system.

The Educator Licensure and Effectiveness team licenses and credentials all Educators and provides statewide programs and initiatives focused on educator standards, evaluations, and support for new educators and educator leaders. In addition, the team supports districts through technical aid and training sessions designed to advance local strategic plans and improve student outcomes. The Office administers programs and initiatives that support educator growth throughout the career continuum. For new teachers, the Resident Educator (RE) Program provides a two-year mentoring and professional development experience to increase teacher retention, enhance instructional quality, and boost student achievement.

The Information Technology Office (ITO) has several primary domains of responsibility. These domains include application development as well as internal and external support for individuals, districts, and organizations across the State of Ohio. ITO also fulfills data management and reporting spanning internal and external data requests on behalf of the agency. This helps researchers and policymakers to make decisions informed by data, and aids in the transparency and customer focus on the part of the agency.

ITO supports the SBOE primarily through the development and maintenance of software platforms and the management of various vendor relationships. The SBOE is serviced by a suite of custom applications, including the Connected Ohio Records for Educators (CORE), the main application and data repository of all Board-issued credentials, applications, and ancillary data, and the Educator Case Management (ECM) application, comprising the management of OPC's business processes and a publicly searchable database of educator discipline. Notably, in response to expanded Rapback enrollment, the ITO team developed the Enterprise Rapback system, saving public dollars that would have otherwise gone to a contractor to do the work. ITO provides consulting and data integration points as needed to the SBOE, such as integration with the evaluation systems OTES and OPES through the Ohio Evaluation System (OhioES). ITO currently also supports the Resident Educator program by providing a software platform to aid in the administration of its duties.

The SBOE is also tasked with facilitating the Ohio Teacher of the Year. The mission of the program is to provide opportunities for professional learning to exemplary teachers as leaders and advocates for the profession. This program has existed since 1964 and annually identifies exceptional teachers statewide celebrating their effective work in and outside the classroom. In that time, Ohio has had three National Teachers of the Year.

The SBOE is responsible for transfers of school district territory, also known as territory transfers. These transfers can be initiated in several ways, but the most common practice is through the citizen petition process. These transfers allow property of one school district to petition to move to another adjacent district.



Teacher Licensure Fund (4L20) and cost saving efforts

The teacher licensure fund is made up entirely by fees paid by educators, administrators, and coaches and is currently the only source of revenue for the SBOE agency. Since 2015, the teacher licensure fund has been depleting at a faster rate than teacher licensing fees are being collected. This depletion has only been exacerbated since the separation of the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) and the SBOE due to items that were funded from the GRF now being entirely funded from the licensure fund.

Over the last 18 months our team has been working tirelessly to find areas of savings. That has included not filling several open positions, eliminating multiple positions, utilization of support from the Central Services Agency, moving office space, elimination of out of state and overnight travel for all SBOE staff, reducing SBOE meetings to a single day, and passing a resolution eliminating SBOE overnight stays for Board meetings unless there is a health and safety concern. While all of these cuts have been impactful, they do not solve our funding issues.

In October 2024 we had the opportunity to engage with LeanOhio which assists Ohio's state agencies in cutting red tape, removing inefficiencies, improving customer service, and achieving measurable results using methods of Lean and Six Sigma. It is our goal to continue to put our processes through the LeanOhio program to continue to become an even more efficient agency.

State Board of Education FY26-27 Budget Request

The State Board of Education has three requests for the FY 2026-2027 budget. Our three requests include the funding of the Rapback system for all individuals required under ORC to be entered into the system through the SBOE. This annual cost would be approximately \$2,250,000. In FY2024, the SBOE paid nearly \$1,900,000 to the Attorney General's Office for teachers, coaches, and bus drivers entering the Rapback system. House Bill 33 of the 135th General Assembly added additional individuals that must enroll in the Rapback system that do not pay into the Teacher Licensure Fund (4L20). Those individuals include custodians, secretaries, food service personnel, and other individuals interacting with students on a regular basis.

Our second request is to eliminate the Resident Educator Summative Assessment (RESA), part of the Ohio Resident Educator Program. The RESA portion currently costs \$1,078,000 per year. The Ohio Resident Educator (RE) Program is a comprehensive, two-year initiative to assist beginning teachers with mentoring and professional development as they start their education careers. The program currently requires completing two years of locally determined mentoring activities and the Resident Educator Summative Assessment (RESA), which results in eligibility for a professional license. The RE Program is designed to improve teacher retention, enhance teacher



quality, and improve student achievement. The RESA is a 20-minute video that a teacher submits to an outside entity to evaluate his or her ability to teach in a classroom. Last school year, 7,106 teachers submitted their RESA for evaluation. Of those, only 57 did not pass on their first attempt, for a passage rate of 99.12%. After conversations with various stakeholders, including associations, administrators, and individuals with personal experience with the program, we believe that districts and schools are best suited to attest to the ability of those teachers in the Ohio Teacher Residency Program.

Our third request is funds to be directed to cover the cost of Assistant Attorneys General (AAGs) and support staff that assist the SBOE. The Attorney General's Office provides AAGs on a full-time basis to represent the State's interest during Chapter 119 administrative adjudications for educator misconduct, the SBOE's interest if those cases are appealed to a Court of Common Pleas, actions in which the SBOE is named as a defendant in a civil action, and the SBOE and the State of Ohio in actions related to territorial transfer disputes. The support of AAGs in the SBOE's administrative proceedings and appeals is integral to SBOE's mission and statutory responsibilities. We are asking for funding in the amount of \$512,510 in FY26 and \$527,886 in FY27, which contemplates current funding amounts plus anticipated cost-of-living adjustments the Attorney General's Office will likely effectuate in the coming fiscal years.

Governor DeWine's budget proposal provided the SBOE with \$2,000,000 out of the GRF to cover the cost of Rapback and included language to eliminate RESA. The Ohio House of Representatives' budget proposal included the language to eliminate RESA but restructured an element of the funding. The House passed proposal would eliminate the Teacher Licensure Fund and transfer the remaining balance of those funds and all future revenue to the Occupational Licensure and Regulatory Fund (4K90). This move would request the SBOE to contribute funds to the Occupational Licensure and Regulatory Fund and use those funds up to our appropriation authority. This is a move that the SBOE supports as it allows us to continue operations and best serve the students and educators of Ohio.

I am proud of the work of the dedicated SBOE team. I am grateful for all the assistance and support from the Governor's Office, the Ohio House of Representatives, the Office of Budget and Management, and the Department of Administrative Services to help us live up to our goal of ensuring that each of Ohio's more than 1.6 million students interacts every day with well-qualified educators who display high levels of moral character and judgement.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to answer any questions the committee members have.