

Testimony for House Bill 96

Senate Finance Committee

May 30, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Finance Committee.

My name is Kristie Reighard, from Swanton. I strongly oppose the language put in the House Budget to reduce the State Board of Education from eleven elected and eight appointed members to five Governor appointees representing urban, rural, suburban, charter, and chartered non-public schools.

In 1953, when voters considered a state Constitutional Amendment to establish the State Board of Education, they wanted a separate entity removed from the Governor's Cabinet. They wanted an independent board to represent the local school boards of Ohio on public education issues. They understood the importance of having more local, not centralized, representation at the state level.

The voters did pass the 1953 amendment. It's now Section 4, Article VI of the Ohio Constitution. The amended House bill entirely reverses over 70 years of established law and the concept of local control. In stripping the State Board of Education of its elected members, we ignore the will of the people.

In November of 2024, I ran and was elected to the State Board of Education to represent 1 million people. I know something about Ohio's education system. I know and have learned first hand in my profession that outcomes are determined by priorities set by its leaders. I have a deep understanding of the challenges public schools face today. For 25 years, I served urban, suburban, and rural districts as a science and career tech teacher and finished my career as a high school principal. Along the way I earned my Master's of Education and Educational Specialist degrees.

I believe Ohio voters maintain that they want more of a voice on education issues, not less. It is even more important today to have voters' representation on local public school issues at the state level.

The State Board of Education members currently have 295 years of collective experience working in education, as teachers, administrators, and education policy experts. These board members are experts in their field of education and use their knowledge and expertise to influence and improve the delivery of high-quality education for all students.

I believe it's historically important to understand how the board was originally created from the 1953 constitutional amendment.

In 1955, the legislature was given the roadmap to establish the composition of the State Board of Education and its duties and responsibilities. The reasons that the State Educational Organization Committee gave in 1955 still hold the same truths today.

Back in 1954, the general assembly took this task seriously, forming a School Survey Committee to survey, analyze, and make recommendations in the form of a report through the “efforts of hundreds, even thousands of people” ([Report of the Ohio School Survey Committee](#), 1955, Page vii).

One of the first items to be addressed by the committee was the “consideration of the composition and organization of the new board. In order to ascertain the sentiment of the people of the state, a pamphlet was distributed to organizations throughout the state summarizing the arguments for and against various proposals and asking for a report of the group’s opinion on each proposal. Replies were received from almost 600 groups representing in the aggregate several thousand citizens throughout the state. In addition, reports were returned by almost 100 individuals.” ([Report of the Ohio School Survey Committee](#), 1955, Page 61).

The committee members, including state representatives and senators, listened to the citizens, to formulate a plan to implement the amendment. It’s very important to know what the study committee heard from the citizens about the composition of the new State Board of Education. “The study committee, after a careful consideration of the merits and disadvantages of all plans, chose the elective system with nomination by petition, for the following reasons:

- It believed that an elected board would more directly represent the will for the people than would an appointive board. The constitutional amendment provides that the state superintendent of public instruction be appointed by the state board of education. **The appointment of both board and superintendent would remove the control of schools too far from the people.**
- It believed an appointed board could be controlled, or at least partially controlled, by the appointing authority. This would create serious problems if the appointing authority were politically minded or dominated by a particular pressure group.” ([Report of the Ohio School Survey Committee](#), 1955, Page 62)

Article 1, Section 2, of the Ohio Constitution explicitly states that all political power is inherent in the people. Please remove the associated budget language and restore the elected state board of education members.

Thank you.