

Over 70 years ago, a majority of Ohioans rightfully voted to protect our public education system and have benefited from the constitutional right to elect members to the State Board of Education (St. Board) from across the state. In this bill, (in less than 50 words), this system of accountability has come under attack.

The creation of the St Board in 1953 through a constitutional amendment was a deliberate and foundational act by the citizens of Ohio. Its purpose was to safeguard public education by establishing a nonpartisan body with elected members and to ensure that public education policy would be guided by professionals and representatives from around the state and held accountable directly to the electorate.

The restructuring of the St Board through the budget process represents a direct threat to the constitutional foundation and democratic principles upon which the Board was established.

The State Board was designed to operate independently, with elected members ensuring public accountability in education policy. Today's budget bill undermines both the intent of Ohio voters and the balance of powers outlined in the state constitution. This shift is not only a potential legal overreach—it is a dismantling of a system built to protect public education and moves educational decision-making further from local communities, without their consent.

In my role on the St Board, I represent over 1,000,000 Ohioans:

- I've assisted State Representatives and Senators in town-hall meetings, answering constituent questions, and in meetings with local elected officials and superintendents - across 6 Senate districts and 12 House districts in 3 counties,
- My local role has enabled me to bring local issues and experiences to the Board room and to assist the State Superintendent in working with the Department of Education & Workforce and the Legislature,
- I'd like to share an anecdote; I had an 8-month running correspondence with a family in my district. One of their kids' favorite teachers was not going to be able to continue because she was struggling to pass one of the content area tests for her licensure. I worked w my peers, staff and vendors to come up with a "Second Chance" process for cases like this. I'm happy to say she is still teaching today

If legislative leaders wish to reform the St Board and its constitutional responsibilities, I ask that they respect the original intent by passing a constitutional amendment for voter approval or, using clear, stand-alone legislation subject to full legislative procedure – not the budget process. Altering the St Board authority or structure significantly impacts constitutional integrity and governance and therefore warrant direct legislative focus.

Using the budget process to make major policy changes blurs the lines between budgeting and lawmaking. I'm urging the Senate not to take away the people's right to elect representatives. I'm appealing to you as deliberate and conscientious lawmakers to use stand-alone legislation to address changes to the St Board, not the budget bill. Thank you.

*Tom Jackson is the State Board of Education member from District 10; Cuyahoga, Summit and Geauga counties. He was elected to a 4-year term in 2022 and lives in Solon, OH.*