

Denis Smith, Former State Charter School Consultant, Ties the New Superintendent of Public Instruction to Charter School Supporters

Denis Smith, a veteran teacher, school administrator, and Ohio Department of Education consultant retired a few years ago but maintains a keen advocacy for public education. In a recent letter to the editor of the Columbus Dispatch, he connects the dots between the new State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the charter lobby. He also raises some potential ethic issues surrounding the superintendent's employment.

Optics aside, new superintendent's hiring shows tone deafness of state school board |

Opinion

Denis Smith

Guest columnist

At its May meeting, [the State Board of Education](#) voted to employ [Steve Dackin](#) as Ohio's new superintendent of public instruction.

But the hiring has raised some concerns that require further reflection.

The state board's decision occurred in the middle of [National Charter Schools Week](#) and prompted questions about the processes used in the appointment. To those familiar with the behavior of some charter boards, where the members are usually hand-picked by the school's operating company and [where tales of conflicts of interest and self-dealing are legion](#), the state board's action will need to be more closely examined lest it acquire the same reputation of so many conflicted charter school boards.

In covering the search process and appointment of a new state superintendent of schools, [the Cleveland Plain Dealer summarized](#) the situation succinctly:

"Steve Dackin was vice president of the State Board of Education and led the search for a vacant superintendent position before resigning and applying for the job three days later. The deadline to apply was the following day."

You don't have to read that paragraph again to realize there was something wrong in the practices of a state board that allowed a board member to conduct the search for a superintendent, resign so that he could apply at the deadline for the position, add his resume to those already received, and then months later be hired for the very position he oversaw as a search committee member of a state board, serving as its vice president no less.

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If a public board is concerned about optics, its actions demonstrate that in addition to suffering from myopia, it's also tone deaf as shown by its hiring of the new state superintendent.

Concurrent with National Charter Schools Week, this appointment by the state school board nevertheless drew praise from the state charter school lobby, including kind words from the [Fordham Institute](#), an organization that promotes these publicly funded, privately operated, and underregulated entities that have demonstrated their basic design flaws.

Appropriately, as a member of charter world, Fordham itself has inherent design flaws, serving simultaneously as a charter school authorizer, promoter, and so-called "[think tank](#)," crafting studies that promote public school privatization, which it calls school choice.

With the main design flaw that doesn't allow the democratic election of board members by qualified voters in a community, we get self-dealing by hand-picked board members, conflicts-of-interest by operators, and all of the ethical issues that surround organizations that are not fully transparent in their operations.

Because of a history of scandal in the state charter school industry, where [more than \\$1 billion in public funds alone went to ECOT](#) in the largest online charter school scandal in the country, and where the wreckage of more than [300 closed Ohio charters](#) have further [depleted the state treasury due to lax oversight caused by few controls](#), the State Board of Education itself should not be acting like a challenged and conflicted charter school board.

Moreover, the enthusiasm for Dackin's appointment expressed by the charter school industry should also raise even [more concerns](#).

As someone who has experience in providing oversight of charter schools as well as service on non-profit boards, my view is that the processes used in the Dackin appointment are troublesome.

For example, some boards have policies that require at least a one-year separation by a board member before applying for employment with the organization.

What about the [state board](#)?

[The Ohio Ethics Commission](#) and other organizations should review the policies and processes of the State Board of Education.

The appearance of a conflict of interest or any ethical question related to actions that employ past or even present board members is a serious issue.

After all, a state public board should not mimic charter school boards that love to receive public money but hate regulation.

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Denis Smith is a retired school administrator and a former consultant in the Ohio Department of Education's charter school office.

An expanded version of the article can be found in the Ohio Capital Journal:

<https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2022/05/25/new-state-superintendent-hiring-raises-questions-about-process-but-the-charter-lobby-is-pleased/>

<https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2022/05/24/opinion-how-did-steve-dackin-become-state-board-superintendent/9805161002/>