

The aura of the Department of Education is controlled by partisan politics when K12 education is embedded in a governor's office.

From 1976 to 1992 I was an assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction during the time that the State Board of Education was an all-elected 4th branch of state government. Partisan politics was not a factor in decision making and leadership strategies regarding hiring practices for Department employees, services to be provided to school districts, education improvement planning, formulation of standards, etc. The Superintendent of Public Instruction was considered the district superintendents' superintendent. The Department staff was cognizant that the Department doesn't educate children, and thus the only role of the Department is to assist school districts in multiple ways to improve educational opportunities for all the children of all the people.

The Department was readily available to assist all other state officials, as well as school district personnel. There was no consideration of "D" or "R" politics in the operation of the Department.

The Department reported to the State Board of Education which was elected on a nonpartisan basis. That independence shielded the Department from partisan politics. For example, a particular governor instructed the Department to hire 35 persons that helped him get elected. His office was told that if any of them had at least a Masters Degree and at least five years' experience in education, they would be considered along with other applicants. The governor's office was not pleased with that response, but the Department was free to focus on its mission by employing persons on the basis of merit, rather than politics. A governor-controlled education department will become a den of partisans who have a job to do without any firm commitment to the public common school system.

When the law was changed to require 8 State Board members to be appointed, politics started to invade the Department.

The partisan politics has already begun in the newly minted Department. The Science of Reading initiative in the Governor's budget seems to have been planted in the budget via a deep-pocketed campaign contributor who is on the Board of Jeb Bush's ExcelinEd organization that promotes the Science of Reading. Hence, the Science of Reading is being mandated by political decision and not by a decision that was informed by Ohio educators, particularly those who teach reading.

Without getting into the political debate about the merits or faults of the Science of Reading, the issue here is how the Science of Reading became a mandate for all Ohio school districts. The lesson is that if one is a political supporter of a governor or other influential public officials, your pet project could be mandated for all school districts without any professional vetting. And of course, a Department of Education embedded in the governor's office will support any project, backed by the Governor, regardless of the merits of it.

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<https://www.cleveland.com/news/2023/02/gov-mike-dewines-enters-the-reading-wars-with-budget-proposal-to-fund-change-to-science-of-reading.html>