

April 23, 2025, Editorial in the Plain Dealer: House budget provisions would quash the people's voice in Ohio education policy. That's wrong.

The editorial provides a short narrative of the formation of the State Board of Education and the erosion of its powers and responsibilities in the previous state budget. The editorial expresses objection to the House proposal to eliminate the elected board member positions.

It is a sad day for Ohioans and democracy when bullies in control of the Ohio Statehouse use vindictive tactics to suppress the voice of the people. Some of the controllers didn't like the outcome of the last state board election so now they will eliminate the elected member positions. These vengeful dictators were not satisfied with transferring nearly all the powers and responsibilities of the State Board of Education to the Governor's office; they now want the whole enchilada. Autocrats have an insatiable appetite for more and more power.

When will some rank-and-file legislators start to serve their constituents rather than their legislative leaders. Of course, the risk of serving constituents is to face a primary election.

House budget provision would quash the people's voice in Ohio education policy. That's wrong: editorial

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- [Editorial Board, cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer](#)

In 1953 -- before many of today's Ohioans were even born -- the people of the state voted by a nearly 57% margin to amend the state constitution [to create a State Board of Education led by a State Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) appointed by the board.

The clear driving force of the amendment, which had been proposed by the legislature, was to give the people of Ohio, via a State Board and State Superintendent, a voice and role in state education policy.

Trump and Musk plan education cuts, major government restructuring

The amendment didn't say so specifically, however, leaving "The respective powers and duties of the board and of the superintendent [to be] prescribed by law."

Yet for 70 years, the implied was the reality. The State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction oversaw state education policy, even as a number of Ohio governors jockeyed for more control over the board - usually regarding how many State Board of Education members were elected and how many the governor could appoint. Currently, 11 of the 19 board members are elected to staggered terms, and eight are appointed by Gov. Mike DeWine.

But the boom was about to fall.

In the aftermath of the 2020 killing of George Floyd, political turmoil and culture-war issues took center stage at the board, and suddenly sleepy State Board of Education elections weren't so sleepy anymore.

In 2022, with four contested State Board of Education elections on the ballot, voters "ousted two GOP incumbents in favor of Democrats and elected another Democrat in a contested district previously held by a Republican" -- [as we noted in an editorial at the time](#).

Reaction to this reversal of Republican fortunes on the State Board was swift. Legislation soon surfaced to gut the State Board's powers, and during state budget negotiations two years ago, that effort succeeded.

The board remained intact at 11 elected and eight appointed members, but the last two-year budget drastically shrank the board's duties. Now, its main responsibilities are [confined primarily to overseeing teacher licensure, school district territory transfers and teacher and counselor evaluation systems.](#)

The meat of the board and superintendent's longtime prior duties overseeing K-12 education in Ohio were transferred to a new Ohio Department of Education and Workforce that answered directly to Gov. Mike DeWine.

That the legislature didn't at the same time mess with the state board's composition may have reflected a reluctance to tamper wholesale with a body the people had voted to create.

No longer, it seems.

Buried in the version of House Bill 96, the two-year budget, that just passed the Ohio House is language that would effectively tamp out any vestiges of the people's voice on the State Board of Education.

Eliminated would be all 11 elected board positions, and the other eight would be [shorn to "five members to be appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the \[Ohio\] senate."](#)

So much for the voice and expectations of the 913,134 Ohio voters who on Nov. 3, 1953, voted to create the State Board of Education as an amendment to the Ohio Constitution.

Two years ago, DeWine's office correctly noted that the wording of the 1953 amendment allowed -- shall we call it, flexibility -- in how the Board was constituted and empowered. But that's weaselly thinking at its finest. Likely few if any of those voting on that constitutional amendment more than 71 years ago envisioned it being monkeyed with in such a way that an independent State Board of Education it seemed to create would become a captive group of five appointees in the governor's office.

Eliminating 11 elected offices via a budget amendment is also wrong on its face, constituting a direct assault on the people's voice. That this assault comes as the legislature is wrestling with other major changes in K-12 education is also concerning. That includes possibly significantly altering the way the General Assembly funds public versus private education, to the apparent detriment not just of public schools but also of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan that was to see its final two years of funding added this year.

The Ohio Senate now has a chance to reconsider the House's rash move against the State Board of Education and to restore the people's voice in state education policy, instead of squashing it like a parasite. It should do so.

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