

So, What Does the State Board of Education Do?

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Campaigning to represent District 10 on the State Board of Education, I was asked that question repeatedly. Then, I listed the general items. We hire the State Superintendent, regulate K-12 education, determine educator training and licensure, and use judgment on educator misconduct and school district territory disputes.

Completing my third year, I realize that our most important work is very little understood by the public or the press. Most of this work is unreported because so much of it is preparation.

There are 19 State Board members, eleven elected to represent districts and eight appointed by the Governor. Terms are staggered so the entire board is never new and all are limited to two 4 year terms.

So, what do we do that is so important? We explore the concerns, emerging issues and best practices that are helping students succeed locally, statewide and nationally.

The professionals at the Department of Education (ODE) do the day-to-day work, then they explain the background, statistics, and possibilities based on what is being done in districts in Ohio and elsewhere. Board members read, study, discuss, question and advise ODE on what we can support. Representing all parts of the state, we bring our perspectives from rural, suburban and urban experiences to the discussion and policy making. Elected members discuss needs and concerns with people in their district. This input as well as the Ohio tradition of "local control" creates complicated discussions and policy.

The State Board cannot adopt action policies unless the Legislature passes laws to require or support that action. Our work is presented to the Legislature as legislative or budgetary recommendations. If any recommendations are incorporated in a bill sponsored by a Legislator, our ideas may be debated and be reported. Not all recommendations become law and many education laws are not recommended by the Board, but once a law regarding education is passed, the State Board or ODE will be charged with implementation. If we find an important element missing or something unworkable, we must recommend changes, hoping the Legislature can and will fix it in future legislation.

The State Board and ODE are the only agencies with the sole mission of supporting and improving K-12 education in Ohio. Months and years of study precede legislative recommendations.

During my term we have studied high school curriculum and structure to assure the success of all students in their preparation for post-secondary education and work in this new economy.

A committee led by State Board members included all who care for and about the wellbeing of our children from birth to 5 years and studied what experiences and care will best prepare them for success in school and provide the emotional and developmental support all young children need, aiding parents in choosing others who may care for their young children. Governor Strickland has expressed a strong interest in early childhood education and this ongoing committee work. Legislative and budgetary recommendations have been submitted to the Legislature.

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Educator training and licensure rules and conduct requirements have been a long time concern of the board. Many of our recommendations have become law, over time. Others have not.

Students are affected by societal influences and family difficulties. For some years the Board and ODE have worked to create supports for students. The Board has adopted a model anti-harassment, anti-bullying policy, a parent involvement policy, and comprehensive system of student support guidelines. ODE works with local educators to help meet these important needs. Guidelines and model policies are not laws. They are voluntarily adopted by local districts.

A State Board committee is studying school funding. We have no power to change funding, but we intend to advise the Legislature if they decide to tackle the issue.

Local districts are making innovative, positive efforts to promote student success. The Legislature sometimes includes these efforts as part of law. Most often, the State Board of Education has studied the issue thoroughly before any policy becomes law. This is our most important, often invisible, work.