

Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission  
Education, Public Institutions, and Local Government Committee

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Presentation – “Observations on the State Board of Education”

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Good morning members of the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission’s Education, Public Institutions, and Local Government Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify in front of you this morning. My name is Stephanie Dodd and I am an elected member of Ohio’s State Board of Education. I was elected in November 2012 and am beginning my fourth year on the board representing the 9<sup>th</sup> District.

My district is comprised of all or portions of the following counties: Franklin, Licking, Pickaway, Fairfield, Perry, Hocking, Athens, Morgan, Muskingum, Guernsey, Coshocton, Tuscarawas and Holmes. As you can tell, the district is substantial in geographical size and contains a diverse population of constituents, schools and students, including urban districts like Columbus City Schools, suburban districts such as New Albany-Plain Township School District, and rural school districts like Hiland Local School District in Holmes County and Morgan Local School District in Morgan County. While racially, socioeconomically and culturally diverse, all of our school districts, their teachers, administrators and parents share a dedication and commitment to providing a quality public education.

Last month, you heard from Board President Tom Gunlock about the makeup and history of the State Board. Whether it is because we got to our seats on the Board in a different way or because we view the role of the Board differently, my perspective is markedly different than that of Mr. Gunlock. I thought it might be helpful to provide a different perspective of the State Board of Education from an elected member who reports to over 1.1 million constituents.

Some might look at the statutory duties of the State Board of Education and think those are easily replaceable by an appointed Board or by no one at all. I want to share with you some of what I do.

I make myself available to parents, teachers, administrators, local board members and students in my district. Members of each of those groups contact me regularly to ask questions and express concerns with education in our districts and in our state. Each time, I have answered or sought to find an answer from our Department of Education or our members of the General Assembly. In return, I learn from them. I seek their opinions, input and expertise when making decisions that directly impact them.

Some of you on this panel serve or served in the General Assembly. If you are like me, you find more value in going on-site to learn about what works and what does not work rather than hearing about it in an office on Capitol Square. Elected members of the State Board of

Education are no different. Look at the time sheets the elected members submit, both Republicans and Democrats. Elected members like me are going out to the districts, hearing the concerns of constituents and figuring out what we can do to solve them or help them. Now look at those filled out by the appointed members. You'll find a substantial disparity in the fieldwork done by each group. I promise you the work we do in the field would not be replaced by an appointed Board, and the work we do serves as a buffer between the people and an increasingly busy General Assembly. Simply put, if you're looking for salvation or accountability in a political appointee, chances are, you're going to be disappointed.

There are few functions of government that touch the lives of more people than education. Everyone in our state goes to school and after they leave school, they support our educational system one way or another. While we all use roads and bridges, a pothole is not comparable to failing to provide a child a quality education. Our elected State Board of Education members provide another outlet to concerned parents, teachers, administrators and students and if those individuals do not approve of what we do or what we say, they have an opportunity to replace us with those they do approve of or support. We should not silence the voice these elected members provide.

There has been talk of the Board being more politicized or partisan in recent months. I cannot say I agree with that assessment. What I have seen is elected members pressing for the accountability that our constituents demand and repeatedly request. Some will say that it creates dysfunction; I say it makes those who desire to get away with something to think twice knowing that impartial eyes will be examining their actions. Our state benefits from this give-and-take.

I ran for election to Ohio's State Board of Education to be a voice for those who became my constituents and I speak with great confidence that I've done just that and will continue to do so for as long as they allow me to serve them.

I thank you for your time and appreciate the opportunity to share with you what it means for me to be an elected member of Ohio's State Board of Education. I gladly welcome any questions you may wish to ask of me.