

Debate continues over State Board's role, responsibilities

A recent opinion editorial authored by a former senior advisor to Gov. John Kasich, Jai Chabria, recommends restructuring the State Board of Education.

Chabria isn't the first to raise questions regarding the State Board's makeup -- 11 elected members and eight appointed -- and responsibilities, and to express concern that the current structure places too much authority in the hands of members generally unknown to most Ohioans.

The Ohio Department of Education is a rare exception in state government in that it is run by the state superintendent of public instruction hired by the State Board, rather than being led by a member of the seated governor's cabinet.

Several current members -- including Sen. Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering), who chairs the Senate Education Committee and attends State Board meetings as an ex-officio member -- have observed that the current board is far less partisan than in recent years. However, she expressed agreement that Ohio's K-12 education system could benefit from a review of the State Board's make-up and focus.

"I do think it would be a healthy thing for us to take a closer look at how we make education policy because frankly there are so many chefs in the kitchen and I think that makes it difficult sometimes," Lehner said in an interview with Gongwer News Service. "The legislature does one thing and the board sees that as an intrusion on what they've done."

"It's not a particularly productive structure and at times it's worse than others, but I do think it would be helpful for everyone to sit down together and see if this is the best policy or to at least delineate ... what is the board's role in all of this, vis a vie the legislature, the department (of education), the governor and others," she said.

