

What Could Be if We Participated in the Board of Education Race

By Makhia Laster, OCAB Intern

“Epistemology is the study of knowledge, especially what is considered to be fact and opinion. Having a say in what is learned can leave a positive impact on a community or contribute to the removal of important history.”

This is where my learning began at Our City Action Buffalo (OCAB). I joined as an intern wanting to understand how community organizing really works, and what I discovered is that one of the most powerful ways to create change is through sharing knowledge and making sure people understand the systems shaping their everyday lives. Disseminating information on a scale that’s meaningful—that’s what OCAB has taught me.

One of the most overlooked, but deeply important, systems in Buffalo is the Board of Education. The Board of Education, or BOE, is not just a group of officials—it’s the body that sets the tone for what students learn, what resources are prioritized, and how classrooms across Buffalo function. With one employee, the Superintendent, and nine elected members—six district representatives and three at-large—the BOE directly influences the lives of over 30,000 students in Buffalo Public Schools. And yet, so few residents are fully engaged with how it works.

Most Buffalo residents don’t know that the BOE oversees a budget of one billion dollars—larger than the entire city budget. That money determines whether students have access to arts programs, after-school activities, safe classrooms, or youth development initiatives that can change the trajectory of their lives. The same people remain in office, cycling through terms without new voices or fresh ideas, and too many of Buffalo’s long-standing inequities in education remain untouched.

As I learned more, I realized something troubling but important: while Buffalo schools operate on a District of Choice system—allowing families to send children to schools outside their district—the right to vote for a district BOE member doesn’t always match where your child attends school. That disconnect, combined with low participation, creates barriers to accountability. It also means that communities often don’t feel ownership over who is making decisions for their children’s future.

But here is where possibility lies. What if we, as residents, stepped into this process more boldly? What if we demanded a Board of Education that looked like the children it serves, that prioritized equity, and that treated education as a public good instead of a battleground for politics?

OCAB believes Buffalo deserves that. That’s why the organization has created a **Board of Education Endorsement Committee**—a space open to all residents, where people can research candidates, hold them accountable, and ensure that endorsed members reflect families, not developers or elites. I’ve learned that you don’t have to be a lawyer, a wealthy

business owner, or someone with “status” to serve on the Board. You just have to care deeply about the education and future of Buffalo’s youth.

For me, being part of OCAB has shown that when communities organize and share knowledge, they can transform systems. The future of Buffalo schools belongs to all of us, but only if we claim it.