

A Constructive Process for Education Funding Reform in Ohio:

Preamble

Ohio has a proud past and a promising future. It was among the early states forming the Union. Ever since, its people have continually contributed to the nation's material prosperity and collective wellbeing.

Throughout this history, Ohio has relied heavily upon education as an engine for creative ideas and as a sustained source of individual talent, citizen leadership, and civic understanding.

However, an education system cannot be taken for granted, assumed always to be relevant and productive. The larger world is a restless setting, forever inventing and reacting to new knowledge, experiencing new conditions, and posing new challenges.

Consequently, it is necessary periodically for a people to examine their education system, to appraise its utility, and to undertake whatever alterations and additions may be necessary to render formal schooling a continued source for societal renewal and individual fulfillment.

Context

For the past two decades, education policy and education funding have played prominent roles in Ohio's public forum. Progress has occurred. For example, the State now possesses a progressive program for assisting schools in the construction of modern facilities and has created measures of academic progress with district and school report cards. A new program of Parity Aid has provided some additional revenue to less wealthy districts, and other improvements in funding have occurred.

However, progress has been neither uniform nor sufficient. The inadequacies in the relationship between State funding and local tax contributions continue to undermine education funding and taxpayers have grown weary. Anemic growth in State revenue contributions in recent years compounds this problem.

At the same time, entrenched positions have evolved on every side so that progressive movement on ideas for improving the education funding system has become impossible. The time has come to move beyond old ideas and antagonisms to develop a new consensus about the best way to fund schools in Ohio.

The Challenge

Whereas our schools have served the state well, the state is not static. It is now appropriate to appraise Ohio's likely future and to ensure that our schools are appropriately empowered and equipped to serve that future.

Recently, 12 organizations representing the education community for school funding reform proposed a ballot initiative to amend the Ohio Constitution. The group struggled to obtain signatures and garner significant support from business and political leadership in Ohio, including Governor Strickland.

The challenge facing the education community is to create a compelling program for education funding reform in time to influence the Strickland Administration and the General Assembly as they begin to develop the next biennial budget for fiscal years 2010 and 2011. Those deliberations will begin formally in January 2009.

Governor Strickland has also proclaimed that he will present an education transformation and funding plan to the public of Ohio in 2009.

By the end of 2008, school organizations and other interested parties will need coherent and realistic recommendations that will inform the biennial budget process and Governor Strickland's education transformation and funding plan. It must come through a process of fresh thinking and thoughtful examination.

Mission

The Education Tax Policy Institute (ETPI) resolves to gather information, to conduct research, and to facilitate the emergence of new perspectives about school funding. The organization will identify options for improving education funding consistent with other education initiatives. In its search for new solutions, it will focus on the need to develop a consensus among Ohio's education community. Specifically, ETPI will set a course to:

- Gather information and distill an understanding of the direction of Ohio's likely civic and economic future and the role education should play.
- Coordinate and align with other education transformation efforts that seek to:
 - Appraise the capacity of Ohio's education system and acquire a just sense of the present system's strengths and weaknesses.
 - Explore a range of new ideas regarding the manner in which Ohio's long-standing system of public education might best serve the future.
 - Develop transformation strategies likely to enable Ohio's education system more fully to meet its obligations to students, parents, and citizens in the future.
- Develop viable components of a compelling plan for education funding reform for Ohio.
- Provide reasoned estimates of the resources needed to achieve successful implementation and sustained operation of the future education system.

Goal and Deadline

Education and Ohio's Future

By the end of the process, participating members of the education community will have information sufficient to agree on a package of education funding and education policy recommendations with broad internal support and with some assurance of substantial support from outside the education community itself.

The process should conclude by the end of calendar year 2008.