



NOTES from the SYMPOSIUM on challenges of public school funding in Ohio

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On March 2nd I attended the free Symposium on School Funding in Centerville, Ohio. A panel of four experts spoke including an economist, an Ohio state Senator, a Legislative Analyst and an Education Professional. The presentations looked at trends in American schooling including staff and pay increases as well as national and state test scores and proficiency ratings in comparison to skyrocketing costs.

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Also discussed were a brief history of Education in America including the influence of The Frankfurt School and John Dewey and where education got off track, an update on the Ohio Supreme Court's DeRolf decision, suggestions and solutions for making schools more efficient, the elimination of tax levies, preserving our communities, and keeping kids first in education.

Some salient points made during the presentations included:

- Ohio may have a spending problem rather than a funding problem.
- Does more money relate to any measure of success? A study from the Cato Institute shows there is no link between school spending and student achievement.
- Half of the time Ohio students spend in school is academics and the other half is social and emotional learning. In fact millions of dollars are spent for social/emotional learning.
- Parents and students want education not social engineering or teaching to a test.
- The classroom should be returned to the teacher and not be run by the state. Teachers should have the ability to do what they do best and evaluations should be at the local level and not state run.
- Caps and guarantees need to be eliminated
- Zero based budgeting should be used instead of fencing off pay and benefits first.
- A community compensation and benefits survey should be done locally to determine what residents are receiving in raises, benefits and bonuses which should then be reflected in the salaries at the local school.
- Parents should be empowered and made more responsible for their child's education
- Money should follow the child, thus putting the child first.
- Board members only get paid \$125/meeting which is not enough for the time they need to

spend to do their job well. Don't offer benefits to Board members but pay them better for their time.

Solutions were offered

It was noted that there are diverse opinions on school funding especially in different regions and for people in different walks of life. Not everyone will agree on the best solution but most agree that we can't continue the way we have been.

Several solutions were offered including curbing expenditures, sin taxes and long distance learning platforms. Some of the more progressive ideas that came out of the presentations included

- Scrapping the Ohio Department of Education and starting over
- Freeing districts which are burdened by debt
- Putting the negotiated teacher contracts as a referendum item on the ballot to be voted on by the public since this is the major expense for all schools.

Responsibilities of members of a community

The Analyst who spoke zeroed in on the responsibilities of members of a community and the local school district so that education is for the students and puts students first:

- * BOARD OF EDUCATION – their job is to lead. The superintendent is their employee. They should direct the employee rather than let the superintendent direct them.
- * TEACHER – the teacher's job is to be free to teach not to be a counselor or a parent.
- * TAXPAYER – their job is to encourage their legislator and understand how levies work.
- * PARENT – The parent's job is to know what is happening in the local school and not let the government take away their rights. They should also support teachers.
- * STUDENT – the student's job is to fight for the right to be educated not indoctrinated.

The state of funding schools

Unfortunately the system we have pits neighbor against neighbor and friend against friend.

It was noted that the current system of funding in Ohio is still unfair but the Ohio Supreme Court has deemed that the legislature has made a "good faith effort" to fix the problem. Unfortunately the system we have pits neighbor against neighbor and friend against friend and communities cannot afford it and yet nothing changes.

The Ohio State Senator who spoke noted that his district in Olentangy has a levy on the ballot in March which will raise his taxes another approximately \$250 per \$100,000 home valuation. He expects the levy will pass and if it does, he and his wife plan to put their house on the market within two months to get out of their increasingly high taxed district.

Loveland is experiencing the same headwinds as other school districts in Ohio. How do we curb expenses that are rising faster than household income, and rising and rising faster than inflation as well? Our communities can't keep up. Are kids really being put first? How do we curb costs and change the funding model so the kids are first?

Loveland is not unique

The discussion was an excellent look at the problems and challenges facing Ohio Schools. Loveland is not unique in the issues facing us with the March levy, increased costs, falling enrollment, and rising pay and benefits.

If you are interested in looking at the recordings and slides from the evening's presentations you can watch the video below. Unfortunately you may hear mocking statements, denials and derisive laughter in the background of the video. A large contingent of Centerville teachers attended the presentations and quite a few of them exhibited unprofessional and uncivil behavior during the presentations. Although the emcee at the beginning of the evening requested that everyone be respectful of differing opinions, sadly this did not occur.