

The Meaning of Key Words in Article VI, Section 2 of the Ohio Constitution

The 1851 constitutional provision for education—"The General Assembly...shall secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state..." is a straight-forward statement that is clear and without ambiguity; nevertheless, a definition of key words will further elucidate the State's responsibility inherent in this provision.

The definitions of key words are taken from Noah Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language, published in 1828.

Secure: to guard effectually from danger; to make safe; to make certain; to put beyond hazard. At the time of the 1850 and 1851 Constitutional Convention, common schools had been in existence for a quarter century; hence, the constitutional charge to the legislature was to guard and protect common schools.

Thorough: literally, passing through or to the end; hence, complete; perfect. That which the General Assembly is to protect would be complete and as perfect as can be devised.

Efficient: causing effects; producing. The system of common schools must produce.

System: an assemblage of things adjusted into a regular whole. The State is responsible for a system, not systems.

Common: belonging equally to more than one, or to many indefinitely; belonging to the public; having no separate owner; serving for use of all; belonging to all. Private schools do not belong equally to all; they have separate owners.

Therefore, the State is responsible for a (ie) one high-quality system of schools belonging to all. Private schools constitute a grouping of schools for which the State has no responsibility and is constitutionally forbidden to support.