

EdChoice Voucher Scheme Does Not Align With the Intentions of the Delegates of Ohio's 1850/1851 and 1873/1874 Constitutional Conventions Regarding the Public Common School System—Part 2*

Part 2: Thorough and Efficient System of Common Schools.

The intent of the constitutional framers is clear. The “thorough and efficient” clause was adopted without issue at the 1850/1851 Constitutional Convention. This language was proposed by the Standing Committee on Education. The framers perception of “thorough and efficient” seemed not to be at issue during the debates. Two things are certain—the delegates adopted the language without hesitation and expected greatness from the common school system.

Dictionaries published near the 1850-1851 Constitutional Convention provide insight into what the Drafters likely understood “thorough” and “efficient” to mean. The 1828 An American dictionary of the English language defined “thorough” as “[l]iterally, passing through or to the end, hence, complete; perfect.” The same dictionary defines “efficient” as “[c]ausing effects; producing; that causes anything to be what is is.” Delegate Hawkins “conveyed a remarkably similar idea when he observed that the “thorough and efficient” standard was in keeping with public sentiment that demanded a ‘full, complete and efficient system of public education.’” supporting the presumption that these definitions shed light on the Drafters’ understanding of “thorough and efficient.” It is rational to assume that the Framers held a similar if not the same understanding of the meaning of “thorough and efficient” provided their definitions at the time of the Debate.

The 1850-1851 Debates frequently demonstrated the Delegates’ intentions for high caliber public education. Moreover, “[t]he record evidences a strong willingness to pass a powerful and broad mandate for a statewide system of common schools.” One delegate proposed that the word “may” replace the word “shall” in Article VI § 2 education clause so that the General Assembly would have a choice in whether or not to make provisions for “a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state.” Another Delegate proposed striking the section entirely. The proposal to strike the section was so unpopular that “nay” votes were left uncounted—the majority vote was evident. The 1850-1851 Debates demonstrate the Delegates’ prevailing sentiment that a mandate for a thorough and efficient education was necessary, and indicate that their understanding of “thorough and efficient” related to perfectionism.

Of course, the EdChoice voucher scheme is a substantial impediment to the state’s attempt to fulfill its responsibility for a thorough and efficient system. This was conspicuously demonstrated during the HB110 budget discussion. The final version of the state budget (HB110) favored EdChoice vouchers over the Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding Plan.

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