

A History Lesson Regarding the Public Common School System

Prior to 1822, Ohio issued charters to various groups that sought permission to operate some kind of education program. In 1819, the legislature appointed a Common School Commission to study the possible establishment of a common school system. By 1825, the legislature had enacted legislation to establish tax-supported and publicly-operated public schools within townships. (The Land Ordinance of 1785 set aside the 16th section of each township to support education).

In 1837, the General Assembly established the position of Superintendent of Common Schools and hired Samuel Lewis as Superintendent. That same year, Horace Mann, considered to be the father of the American common school, became the Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. Lewis resigned in 1840 and the legislature abolished the position of Superintendent of Common Schools. The Constitutional Convention of 1850 and 1851 mandated the legislature to secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state.

Prior to the 1851 Constitutional mandate, private schools were a substantial part of the educational scene in Ohio. Private school supporters were typically negative toward the common system. Common school supporters were enthusiastic toward the public system and worked diligently to improve it. These common school supporters resisted any and all forms of tax support for private education. The prevailing opinion was: private schools, private support. Until the late 1960's tax support for private education was avoided. Public policy emphasis was solely on public education.

Beginning in the late 1960's, the door to the public treasury was jarred open for private school ventures by the enactment of a bill to provide transportation to private schools at public expense. The crack in the door energized the privatization crowd. The wider the opening, the more energized the privatization crowd became. Privatizers first argued that the public school "monopoly" should have tax-supported competition. Now, the privatizers want the traditional public school system eliminated.

Meanwhile, the public education support groups seem quite complacent. With a few exceptions, only a few of them understand that public education is in jeopardy and work diligently to preserve it. It's time to awake from slumber.