

To the Governor: Developing a Thorough and Efficient System of Common Schools Should be on your Priority List

The January 10 [Columbus Dispatch](#) coverage of your inaugural address didn't mention the development of a constitutional system of public common schools as one of your priorities; yet in the waning days of the 134th General Assembly in the context of the Ohio Senate's proposal to transfer the powers and duties to your office you said you would welcome that move. Governor, the real problem with public education is the unconstitutional school funding system, not the state governance structure.

Possibly you mentioned the development of a constitutional system of common schools as a priority but the reporter didn't report it in the article.

DEWINE SWORN IN

What can Ohioans expect from governor's second term?

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For Gov. Mike DeWine, the next four years are about planting a legacy, the capstone of more than four decades in Ohio politics.

DeWine was sworn in for his second term at his Cedarville home Sunday and held a ceremonial inauguration at the Ohio Statehouse Monday afternoon. In his address, DeWine talked about Ohio's future and the work yet to be done.

"My fellow Ohioans, those of you who know me know I am an optimist. I have never been more optimistic about our days ahead than I am right now," DeWine said. "This truly is Ohio's moment."

In his first State of the State address in 2019, DeWine promised lawmakers that he would invest in things without an immediate return, much like planting seeds: "In many cases, we won't see results during the term of this administration or even in our lifetimes."

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. And a massive state bribery scandal that ousted the sitting House speaker. And a deeply political fight over redistricting resulting in unconstitutional maps.

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"Not long into my first term, we found ourselves facing an invisible enemy that threatened our health and our lives. Yet, Ohioans rallied – as you always do – and showed the world your resilience," De-Wine said Monday.

With a decisive victory over Democratic former Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, Ohio voters gave DeWine more time.

"Thank you for giving us the most precious thing there is in the world and that is time, time for us to continue to work for you as we tackle our state's unfinished business," DeWine said.

Building a better mental health system

DeWine wants to use that time to build a mental health system that was promised in President John F. Kennedy's Community Mental Health Act of 1963 but never actually fulfilled.

"Our goal is to build a mental health system in the state of Ohio that we should have built 60 years ago and nobody did really very, very well," DeWine said during an Ohio Chamber of Commerce event in November.

Those with severe persistent mental illnesses were promised housing and support when the nation closed its mental health institutions, but for many Americans – and Ohioans – that wasn't the case. Instead, many filled emergency rooms, county jails and homeless shelters.

"We will transform Ohio into the best state in the nation for mental health treatment," DeWine said Monday. That system will require "significant dollars" and will be a focus of DeWine's next budget. His priorities include:

- Increasing the number of workers in mental and behavioral health fields, including devoting \$85 million to paid internships and residencies.
- Expanding behavioral health research, focusing on the root causes of illness and addiction and early intervention.
- Creating a full continuum of treatment from prevention and crisis intervention to outpatient counseling services and housing.

"It's clearly not political, because there's no political advantage to doing what he's doing," said Luke Russell, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio. "He's doing it because he cares about those with serious mental illness."

But helping those with serious mental illness could also save money in the long run by cutting costs at jails, prisons and psychiatric stays frequently paid for with Medicaid dollars, Russell said.

"Just sending someone to the doctor once a month to pick up their medication and sending them home isn't working," Russell said. "It hasn't worked for 30 years, and so the question is: Are we willing to address it?"

Plugging the brain drain

Ohio's population has remained largely stagnant in recent decades and its residents are growing older. DeWine is focusing on keeping Ohio's approximately 375,000 college students instate after graduation.

"To those living outside of Ohio, let me say this: If you want to raise a family, get a good-paying job and have an amazing quality of life – come to Ohio," DeWine said Monday, making a point to welcome legal immigrants.

Retaining college students might include matching college students with paid internships and externships with Ohio businesses, said Steve Stivers, president and CEO of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. “We think that if they make a connection with an Ohio-based employer while they are in college, they’ll be more likely to take a job with that employer and stay in Ohio after they graduate.”

Ohio’s leaders also hope to attract more companies like Intel to the state, bringing high-paying jobs with them.

“We don’t have mountains. We don’t have oceans, but our value proposition is an affordable cost of living, high quality of life and just an easier, more inviting lifestyle,” Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said in December.

DeWine also touted a renovation of the Ohio State Fair and an expected World Heritage Site designation for Ohio’s Hopewell earthworks in Ross, Warren and Licking counties. “This is a big deal.”

But Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat who campaigned on protecting abortion access, contended that attracting and retaining younger people is about more than jobs and low tax rates. Ohio’s GOP-controlled Legislature has passed abortion restrictions and failed to pass LGBTQ protections.

Whitmer made a pitch during her campaign: “Go to Purdue and talk to every woman engineer, as well as Ohio State, and bring them to Michigan, where you can have full rights to make your own decisions about your health and your body and a great job.”

Ohio House Minority Leader Allison Russo, D-Upper Arlington, said Ohio must be welcoming to retain talent. “We still have quite a bit of work to be done,” and it would help to stop “very extreme pieces of legislation” that threaten abortion access and LGBTQ protections.

Making housing affordable

DeWine promised to tackle affordable housing in his next budget after signing a bill that opponents fear will undermine it.

DeWine did not line-item veto changes in a massive bill allocating federal COVID-19 response dollars that will prohibit projects from claiming both the federal low-income housing credit and Ohio’s Historical Preservation Tax Credit. Opponents say this threatens affordable housing developments across the state. The change wasn’t DeWine’s idea, but it was part of a negotiated bill that included his priorities, such as \$175 million for mental health. “I did not feel that in good faith for the agreement we had before and agreements that we might have in the future that this would be a very wise thing to do,” DeWine said of his decision.

DeWine did promise to propose a low-income housing tax credit to construct and rehabilitate properties. De-Wine said if approved, the credit would be a “game changer.”

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Across Ohio, there is a shortage of rental property available for extremely low-income households, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. About 28% of renters are at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of their area median income.

DeWine also wanted to create a tax credit to develop more single-family homes to encourage home ownership in the state.

Hot-button issues: abortion to guns

Tackling mental health or affordable housing could engender bipartisan support, but DeWine is sure to face more divisive issues.

“Mike DeWine has the opportunity to live up to his bipartisan rhetoric on the campaign trail. Now that he has no office left to run for, he can finally stand up to (Senate President) Matt Huffman and extremists in the legislature on issues ranging from redistricting to voting rights to gun safety,” Ohio Democratic Party Chair Liz Walters said.

Those issues include: Abortion: DeWine, who describes himself and Ohio as “pro-life,” will likely receive a bill to ban all abortions in the state. Ohio Right to Life President Mike Gonidakis expects DeWine will sign it, saying “I expect Ohio to be abortion-free before the end of his second term.”

Guns: DeWine proposed several changes to crack down on criminals with guns and restrict access to firearms, but they went nowhere in the Republican- controlled Legislature. Instead, he signed bills to eliminate training needed to carry concealed guns and make it easier to arm teachers.

Death penalty: DeWine hasn’t shared his personal opinion on the death penalty, but he hasn’t overseen any executions during his tenure as governor because of a shortage of lethal injection drugs. “We’ve had no executions and I don’t anticipate any,” DeWine said.

Marijuana: DeWine opposes the legalization of marijuana. Lawmakers have four months to act on a proposal to legalize recreational marijuana before it could head to voters.

LGBTQ rights: DeWine sidestepped questions about whether he would ban transgender girls from female sports or restrict treatment for transgender youth when both proposals died in the Ohio Legislature. But conservative lawmakers are likely to push them again.

Jessie Balmert is a reporter for the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau, which serves the Akron Beacon Journal, Cincinnati Enquirer, Columbus Dispatch and 18 other affiliated news organizations across Ohio.

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Gov. Mike DeWine

in his inaugural address