

Do Ohioans really want to return to the 1950's in educational opportunities and student rights?

When my teaching career began in 1958, public school expenditures were quite low. Educational opportunities were limited. Educator salaries were dismal. (High school dropouts who worked in factories often made twice as much annually as teachers in many communities.)

Programs for disadvantaged students and students with disabilities were generally limited and non-existent in most school districts. Career/technical programs, except for vocational agriculture and home economics, were generally nonexistent in most school districts. Students that earned a minimum of 16 credits, even with a D average, could receive a high school diploma.

Sports programs were very limited or nonexistent for girls. Students could be expelled from school without due process. Students with severe disabilities were not, in most cases, eligible to attend school.

Many, if not most, Ohio school districts, because of a teacher shortage, employed many teachers engaged in a "cadet" program, in which persons with two years of college could start teaching while continuing their work toward a teaching degree.

Those were the good old days of public education. Fortunately, local and state officials collaborated on developing state policies that focused on improved educational opportunities for students and professionalized teaching.

However, beginning in the last quarter of the twentieth century, state officials took a wrong turn in public education. They began an incremental allocation of tax funds to private schools and privately-operated charter schools, neither of which are held to the same standards and regulations that define public schools.

So, in this new arrangement for education, the protection, opportunities, and rights of students are greatly diminished in the private and semi-private school arenas.

A quick review of what is lost to the private school world:

- No automatic eligibility to attend.
- Limited or no career/technical opportunities.
- No due process regarding expulsion.
- Limited or no opportunities for children with disabilities.
- Limited or no federal Title IX protection.
- No guarantee of a state licensed teacher.
- No public accountability and transparency regarding programs and services and financial audits.

For at least 100 years after the state was assigned the obligation to secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools, state officials, in collaboration with school district officials and school employee groups, worked to improve educational opportunities for students via the common school system. What the state is offering in the name of school choice (the private schools' choice) is a dumbing down of rights and opportunities for students.