

**Laura Hancock's Cleveland.com article on the investigation into the state funding private school facilities projects.**

In the Cleveland.com October 8 [article](#), Laura Hancock reports that the Washington-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State is investigating state tax funding of capital projects for private schools. The article lists the private schools that received tax funds.

The amount of funding inserted in the most recent State Capital Funding Bill is only a few million but is it a foot-in-the-door. The universal EdChoice voucher scheme is the sequel of a \$4-5 million dollar voucher pilot project forced on the Cleveland School District in the mid-1990's.

The EdChoice voucher scheme must be stopped by the Coalition/VHO litigation; otherwise, the taxpayers of Ohio will be funding private school facilities while public school district facilities are neglected.

**Ohio's capital budget quietly funded private school construction. Now, a national group is investigating**

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- [Laura Hancock, cleveland.com](#)

COLUMBUS, Ohio - A Washington-based organization that fights for the separation of church and state is investigating distributions in Ohio's capital budget, which provided \$5.6 million for construction and remodeling at 10 private schools.

It's believed to be the first time Ohio has funded building construction for private schools in recent memory, and Ohio could be the first state in the country to do so.

Kanata residents say rat infestation has taken over row house

The funding comes from the capital budget, which pays for construction projects for state buildings, public schools, colleges, [as well as numerous community projects](#). The money was quietly slipped into the budget and [wasn't reported](#) until three weeks ago.

The two-year capital budget that passed in late June was \$4.2 billion. Proportionally, the spending for private schools is small.

But legislative observers say that when the General Assembly began funding private school vouchers, that program started small – just available for students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Over time, lawmakers added more money and created new voucher programs or expanded existing ones. Today, nearly \$1 billion is spent on private school vouchers and everyone – regardless of family income level– qualifies for at least a partial scholarship.

State spending on private school construction projects could follow a similar trajectory, they warned.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State on Thursday launched an investigation into Ohio's funding at religious schools, it announced in a statement. Two of the schools – Greater Dayton School and Spire Institute and Academy in Ashtabula County – are not affiliated with any church.

The following are the private schools that received money the from One-Time Strategic Community Investment Fund:

- Warren: Holy Trinity Orthodox Christian Academy & Preschool – \$1 million
- Geneva, Ashtabula County: Spire Institute and Academy - \$1 million
- Mansfield: Mansfield Christian School – improvements- \$1.5 million

- Lakewood: St. Edward High School - [sustainable urban agriculture](#) - \$800,000
- Dayton: [Greater Dayton School](#) project - \$600,000
- Lima: Temple Christian School - building expansion - \$250,000
- Bellefontaine, Logan County: Bellefontaine Calvary Christian School - \$250,000
- Niles, Trumbull County: Victory Christian School - renovation - \$100,000
- Tallmadge, Summit County: Cornerstone Community School - Special Education - \$76,393
- Chadron, Geauga County: St. Mary's Catholic School - playground enhancements - \$4,000

The separation of church and state means that Ohioans get to decide if, whether or how to engage with religion, said Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United, in the news release. This protects both taxpayers' religious freedom and the sanctity of religion she said.

By forcing taxpayers to fund the building of private schools, Ohio is "obliterating that promise of religious freedom," she said.

"This is all part of the Christian Nationalist playbook for undermining our public education system: Divert public money to private religious schools while imposing their religious beliefs on public schoolchildren," she said. "Rather than funding private religious schools that can discriminate and indoctrinate, Ohio should focus on providing adequate resources to public schools that welcome and serve all families. Public funds belong in public schools."

Americans United requested from the Ohio Office of Budget and Management all communications between OBM and the schools after the budget passed, including all grant agreements and contracts.

John Fortney, a spokesman for Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman – where two private schools in his district received funding, Temple Christian School and Bellefontaine Calvary Christian School – defended the spending.

"This is laughable and a lie that the left is using to yet again vilify parents who send their students to a school of their choice," he said.

While Americans United characterized the funding as a grant, because recipients [had to use the state's grant portal to obtain the funding](#), Fortney said it is simply one-time funding "that communities and organizations could apply to for help funding projects which would not otherwise qualify for the normal Capital Budget process."

Hundreds of organizations received parts of the total \$717 million One-Time Strategic Community Investment Fund, he said.

[That includes Cleveland.](#) The one-time fund provided \$7 million for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame museum expansion and renovation project, \$2.4 million for the West Side Market and \$20 million for the North Coast Connector, the planned land bridge connecting with the lakefront.

Traditional public schools and charter schools also received money from the strategic fund, such as Burton Berkshire Local Schools in Geauga County, which received \$915,037 for a career pathways program. In another section of the capital budget, [public schools received \\$600 million for building projects](#), although the schools are expected to come up with a local share before they can tap into the state funds.

"You spend most of your time talking to people who are disappointed. So \$717 million were spent. We had nearly \$4 billion worth of requests," said Sen. Matt Dolan, a Chagrin Falls Republican who chairs the

Ohio Senate Finance Committee, [during a Senate GOP podcast](#) dropped shortly after the budget passed both chambers of the legislature. “So the vast majority of requests did not make it.”

Dolan said that when evaluating requests, lawmakers looked at whether they would create economic development and improve the area’s quality of life. Lawmakers also wanted projects in which local funds were lined up to help pay for it. They wanted the communities to have “skin in the game,” he said.

Christina Collins, executive director of Honesty for Ohio Education, a coalition that is fighting right-wing influences in Ohio’s education system, said all children deserve to be educated in safe buildings.

“We need to invest in those buildings where the majority of our kids go, and a private school can always change its tuition to accommodate its construction costs,” she said. “But public schools obviously can’t do that same thing. This is frustrating, for sure. It’s more and more resources being diverted” from public schools.