

October 31, 2024, 3News Investigates: Ohio taxpayer funds being invested in private schools with religious ties.

[3News Investigates](#) checked out Ohio's inaugural journey into the unconstitutional, uncultivated sector of funding facilities for religious private schools. In recent months, the Senate President had been salivating about funding private school facilities, particularly in rural areas. In a foot-in-the-door venture, some private school facility projects were inserted into the State's Capital Improvements Bill. Surprise! Not really. The "we kinda do what we want" Senate President is bent on increasing the demand for EdChoice vouchers. What better way than billing taxpayers for private school facilities?

"Unprecedented"; "But illegal is the one I always fall on," responded Dr. Jim Lloyd, Superintendent of Olmsted Falls School District.

3News Investigates: Ohio taxpayer funds being invested in private schools with religious ties

Millions of dollars in surplus funds were sent to private, religious schools, including some in Northeast Ohio.

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OLMSTED FALLS, Ohio — Ohio government funds are now being directed not only to public facilities, but in some instances to private religious schools. The move raises questions about the role of taxpayer dollars in both public and private [education](#), while some are defending the spending.

A \$717 million budget surplus was allocated for "one-time community investment funds" earlier this year. Hundreds of projects were approved across the state, with the goal of creating local jobs and boosting revenue.

Examples like museum enhancements, public pool renovations, and emergency management services all serve the great good. However, several private schools also received hundreds of thousands of dollars, and in some cases up to or more than \$1 million.

Some of those schools have religious ties, which further complicates the conversation.

"Unprecedented, all those things," Dr. Jim Lloyd said when asked about his reaction to public funding going to private schools. "But illegal is the one I always fall on."

Lloyd has worked in schools for more than 30 years and has been superintendent of Olmsted Falls City Schools since 2013. But all that time in education can't help him understand this latest wrinkle in the state budget.

"It baffles me why we're using public funds to push toward private and parochial schools," Lloyd told [3News Investigates](#). "Those resources should go to the public schools system, because that's what the Ohio Constitution says."

Lloyd isn't the only one who disagrees with the spending. Americans United, a national nonprofit dedicated to protecting the separation of church and state, has vocalized concerns about the standard being set.

"It is unprecedented to have taxpayer funds go directly to religious schools," insisted Rebecca Markert, vice president and legal director at AU.

Americans United believes this is the first instance where a state has ever directed funds directly to a school with religious ties. Their worry is that by allocating funds directly to schools, rather than the families that use the voucher program, the use of taxpayer dollars becomes unconstitutional.

"It (the U.S. Supreme Court) never gave the money directly to religious institutions (through any of its decisions), so it's not giving money directly to a church," Markert pointed out. "That has never been deemed constitutional in our country."

3News Investigates reached out to several private Northeast Ohio schools that received funding to learn about how they plan on spending it, but hasn't heard back. The perceived lack of transparency is part of Lloyd's frustration.

"If you're going to give public resources to private institutions, then they should have to follow the same rules that we have to follow when we take public funds, and that doesn't exist right now," he explained.

After we requested an interview, the office of the Ohio Senate Republicans directed us to a sit-down conversation between Senate Finance Chair Matt Dolan, of Chagrin Falls, and Senate majority communications director John Fortney. In the video clip, Dolan explained how potential projects were selected.

"What projects in my community can we invest in that would produce economic development, more jobs, more revenue, and/or improves the quality of life?" Dolan outlined.

But in the 37-minute talk produced as part of the Ohio Senate GOP's "President's Podcast" series, Dolan doesn't appear to address complaints about religious schools receiving funds. When asked about those concerns via email, Fortney sent a statement pushing back against American United, claiming they are "vilifying parents who send their students to a school of their choice"

"This is laughable and a lie that Unamerican United, a far left DC special interest group, is using to yet again vilify parents who send their students to a school of their choice. The OTSCIF was not a grant as characterized by this progressive group, it was simply a one-time fund 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 applied for funding from the \$717 million fund which represented an important investment back into neighborhoods across Ohio."

For a lifetime educator who has spent his entire career in the public school system, Lloyd says he supports the growth of all students, regardless of which district or school they choose to attend.

"It's great for those families, and it doesn't mean those kids don't deserve great programs. They just don't deserve great programs at public expense," Lloyd insisted. "If you want great programs at public expense, come to public school."

You can read Ohio House Bill 2 below. The list of every institution and school which received the taxpayer dollars (public or private) can be found beginning on page 15.

[3News Investigates: Ohio tax dollars invested in private schools | wkyc.com](#)