

**Quotes in the January 8 Capital Journal by Superintendents Charles Smialek of Parma and Aaron Sable of Medina, in response to the House Speaker's statement regarding the Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding Plan not being sustainable, are spot on.**

Every Ohio school superintendent and board president should follow the lead of superintendents Smialek and Sable to push back on the Speaker's statement. The one-billion-dollar EdChoice voucher scheme and upcoming voucher enhancements seems to be sustainable but not the very system the Ohio Constitution mandates.

How much worse is this anti-public common school rage going to advance until the entire public common school community comes together in one united wall of resistance?

**Ohio GOP threatens to cut school funding, calling spending 'unsustainable'**

By: [Morgan Trau](#) - January 8, 2025 10:12 am

Ohio Republican leaders are looking at cutting spending for public education, calling the current formula — a policy that was created after the state had unconstitutional funding for three decades — “unsustainable.”

House Speaker Matt Huffman, R-Lima, a champion of sending taxpayer dollars to private schools through the EdChoice voucher system, questions how well public schools are spending their money.

Two Northeast Ohio superintendents beg him to reconsider but also question how accountable the voucher system is.

Public money for public schools

The vast majority of Ohio students go to public schools. And for a good education, Parma City Schools Superintendent Charles Smialek says K-12 needs to be fully funded.

Seventy-five percent of PCSD's funding comes from property taxes, while the rest comes from the state. That's thanks to the Cupp-Patterson Fair School Funding Plan.

The Ohio Supreme Court ruled in 1997 that the way the state funds schools is unconstitutional, relying too much on property taxes.

House Bill 1, introduced by state Reps. Bride Rose Sweeney, D-Cleveland, and Jamie Callender, R-Concord, in 2021, required \$333 million additional dollars a year for K-12 education funding — or about \$2 billion overall over the course of six years.

Their bill mirrored the policy that passed the House but not the Senate in the General Assembly prior, which was created by former Speaker Bob Cupp, R-Lima, and former state Rep. John Patterson, D-Jefferson. House Bill 1 was passed and signed into law.

The rollout was supposed to take six years and is meant to change how public dollars are provided to K-12 schools. It would give additional support to local districts so they can rely less on property taxes.

The first two years were partially fully-funded, the second two years were fully-funded, and there are just two years left to go. But under new leadership, that may not happen.

“I don't think there is a third phase to Cupp-Patterson,” Huffman told reporters Monday evening. “As to the expectation that those things are gonna go in... I guess the clear statement I can say is I think those increases in spending are unsustainable.”

The G.A. from four years ago shouldn't be able to “bind” what the future lawmakers can do, he said.

Huffman explained that this year's budget is going to have significantly less money due to the federal COVID dollars drying up. And for him, public education is on the chopping block.

"That's often how a lot of projects go — early on it doesn't cost very [much] money — but some other governor or General Assembly will have to figure out how to pay for it," he continued. "As it turns out, I am the other General Assembly years in the future, or possibly am, and I don't think the spending is sustainable."

So what happens if the FSFP is decreased or is cut entirely?

"Where they think we can come up with this money — I'm just not sure other than, again, to go to the local taxpayers," Smialek said to me. "And as you indicated, (the local taxpayers) already feel they're overburdened."

For the past few years, schools around the area have [struggled to pass levies](#). Parma's have failed four times. This is hard on the superintendent and the entire district.

"We can't sustain the program that we offer for students with reduced funding," he said. "We have to come back to our local taxpayers or we have to make cuts, and those cuts will absolutely impact our students and our families."

Parma would have to cut jobs, require fees to participate in extracurriculars, cut down the amount of hours in class for high school students, or increase class sizes to 30 kids, the superintendent said.

One of the few levies to succeed last November was Medina City Schools' — after their third try.

"It's not to build any new buildings or facilities," Medina Schools Superintendent Aaron Sable said. "It was simply to maintain what we have in place."

Sable's schools also rely on the state for 20% of their funding, he said. It would be detrimental to lose, the superintendent continued.

Despite the levy passing, Sable understands why it was such a close vote.

"It's about people being in a financially difficult situation — property values drastically increasing, a lack of understanding as to why their property values are increasing and how those tax dollars are being spent," he continued.

A common misconception in the area was that when property taxes went up, more automatically went to the schools. That isn't true since they are flatlined, he said.

Had the levy not passed, they would have been looking at at least an additional \$8 million in reductions going into the next school year, so doubling what reductions they made into this school year, the superintendent added.

"It would be a complete restructuring and dismantling of the district," he said.

Both superintendents think this is Huffman's goal.

"Do you believe this is an effort to privatize education?" we asked Sable.

"I think there's been an ongoing effort by some legislators to privatize public education," Sable responded.

We asked the same question to Smialek.

"You try not to be cynical, but ultimately, it has been," Smialek responded. "If you look at the money that went into the voucher system, we're almost at \$1 billion. So when we talk about what isn't sustainable, we're not hearing that the \$1 billion in EdChoice vouchers wasn't sustainable."

Public money for private schools

Huffman is one of, if not the most, vocal advocate in the legislature of EdChoice, Ohio's private school voucher system. The state spent nearly [\\$1 billion](#) in public money to send kids to nonpublic schools in 2024. Parents of any income level can apply for "vouchers" to help pay private or other nonpublic schools' tuition.

Huffman and many GOP lawmakers believe spending that much on EdChoice is necessary in order to have the money "follow the child" or have the students avoid poor-performing public schools.

"This program is designed to acknowledge the unique abilities and needs of Ohio's student population and to foster an educational environment in which every student can have access to the best learning environment for them," state Rep. Riordan McClain, R-Upper Sandusky, said in his testimony for one of his bills supporting vouchers.

A parent shouldn't be forced to choose between moving to another school district for their child to go to a different school, he said.

"Ohio has made strides with the EdChoice Scholarship to provide new opportunities for financially challenged families as well as students in 'failing' districts," he added.

If you can afford to pay out of pocket for education or you make a lower amount of income and are eligible for an EdChoice scholarship, you are able to have "educational options," the lawmaker said.

"But, for most Ohioans who fall somewhere in between those two ends of the bell curve, the only option for your child's education is determined by your home address," he said.

The number of students receiving EdChoice Expansion vouchers increased from 23,272 students during the 2022-2023 school year to 82,946 students during the 2023-2024 school year, according to data provided by the [Ohio Department of Education & Workforce \(ODEW\)](#).

But the number of students enrolled in private schools during the 2023-24 school year only increased by 3,719 students, according to ODEW.

This means that the vast majority of new private school voucher spending went to students who were already attending private schools.

Some public schools don't have what parents want, Huffman has said repeatedly for years.

"We have to look at whether these dollars are being spent wisely in some districts," he said to reporters Monday. "We know they are in many."

Smialek took offense to that, adding that he wishes his district could afford to put air conditioning in 11 out of 13 school buildings that don't currently have it.

"To say that money is not being spent wisely is, essentially, a slap at your population," the superintendent added.

Sable questioned how wisely the *state* was actually spending money.

"Public schools are held to a very high standard, not only financially and how we're spending public dollars, but also how our students are performing, ensuring that our teachers and administrators are licensed and background checked," he said.

Both he and Smialek questioned how Huffman could accuse public schools of not spending wisely when we don't even know how private schools are spending voucher dollars.

"Those kinds of parameters and expectations are not in place for private schools," Sable said. "I think it's not responsible for Ohioans to not hold a sector responsible for how they're spending our public tax dollars each year — but the legislators have determined that that's not important."

Throughout the lame duck session, lawmakers were hearing a handful of bills dedicated to increasing accountability for the private school voucher system.

[H.B. 407](#), the one that was most likely to pass, was introduced by state Reps. Gayle Manning, R-North Ridgeville, and Bill Seitz, R-Cincinnati.

Originally, it included provisions that would have required private schools participating in the EdChoice voucher program to submit an annual report to the state showing how state funds are being spent while also reporting information about the family income of each voucher scholarship student.

But state Rep. Sarah Fowler Arthur, R-Ashtabula — the lawmaker who received international backlash for telling saying that the Holocaust should be taught from [“both sides”](#) in school — stripped those provisions from the legislation.

Both House Minority Leader Allison Russo, D-Upper Arlington, and former House Speaker Jason Stephens, R-Kitts Hill, said there should be an accountability aspect when it comes to this system.

Stephens, who is rivals with Huffman, wasn't impressed by the new speaker's direction when it comes to schools.

“There has always been three phases in the Cupp-Patterson funding plan. We funded the first phase in 2021, the second phase in 2023, and we should fund the final phase in 2025,” Stephens said.

We reached out to see how the other chamber was reacting to Huffman's comments.

“Every two years the school funding formula is reviewed and evaluated as part of the budget,” Senate GOP spokesperson John Fortney said. “That will remain the case this year.”

When it comes to Smialek, he had one question for Huffman.

“What type of education do you want for the lesser privileged among us?” he asked.

The funding plan will be decided in the budget — which will be heard in the coming months.

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