

January 9 Capital Journal: Public school advocates take issue with new Speaker's claim that funding model is "unsustainable".

The Speaker of the House piqued the interest of the public education community when he recently stated that the state's Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding Plan adopted by the legislature is "unsustainable". The Ohio Capital Journal's January 9 [article](#) by Susan Tebben identifies some pushback to his statement from some public education advocates.

It is truly amazing that this public official who drove the universal EdChoice voucher legislation at a cost of \$1 billion annually and growing would have the audacity to state that funding for the constitutionally-required public school system is unsustainable.

Public school advocates take issue with new Ohio Speaker's claim that funding model 'unsustainable'

By: [Susan Tebben](#) - January 9, 2025 5:00 am

As Ohio's 136th General Assembly begins, the newly minted House Speaker has already taken a stand on education, saying spending for the state's public school funding model is "unsustainable."

Priorities (and for that matter, legislative committees) have yet to be formally established, but comments by Speaker Matt Huffman, R-Lima, have already brought criticism from public school advocates across the state.

Speaking to reporters after the first official meeting of the Ohio House under his leadership, Huffman was asked about the Cupp-Patterson public school funding plan, also called the Fair School Funding Plan by supporters.

The [funding model for state support of public schools](#) has been through most of its six-year phase-in, seeing funding through the last two budget cycles. This year was set to be the last phase-in for the funding, but Huffman said there is no such thing as a "three-generation roll-out" and pointed to his [comments when Cupp-Patterson was first considered](#) by the legislature. Back then, he did not support funding the full measure all at once, because he said it would tie down future state legislatures with a funding method they may or may not be able to afford.

"I don't think there is a third phase to Cupp-Patterson," Huffman said this week. "I guess the clearest statement I can say is that I think those increases in spending are unsustainable."

The new speaker went on to say the state needs to look at "whether these dollars are being spent wisely in some districts, we know they are in many."

Public school advocates have fought for the funding model, a model that focuses on real-time costs from district to district, rather than a blanket amount of state funding for all schools. While the comments from Huffman were criticized by advocates, they didn't necessarily come as a surprise.

"It's certainly disappointing, but it doesn't change anything for us," said Scott DiMauro, president of the Ohio Education Association. "Implementing the Fair School Funding Plan is still our top priority."

Without the funding, public schools will have to reach further into the pockets of taxpayers with levy-increase requests, something that shouldn't have to happen under a system that constitutionally supports public schools.

"If the speaker thinks there isn't enough education funding to go around, Ohio law is very clear," Melissa Cropper, president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers, told the Capital Journal. "The legislature must fund public schools and make cuts to the costly and ineffective universal private school vouchers that

were put in place by Speaker Huffman (as an Ohio senator) and other legislators,” said Melissa Cropper, president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers.

Those who support the funding model pointed to the [\\$1 billion](#) that went to scholarship funds including the EdChoice private school voucher program in 2023, which the legislature approved to give Ohio students [near-universal eligibility](#) to move to private schools of their choosing if they live in public school districts considered under-performing.

“If the speaker wants to talk about sustainability, you have to start with those numbers,” DiMauro said.

Late last year, the legislature also [removed provisions of a bill](#) that would have added accountability measures to the private school voucher program, despite education advocates asking that accountability measures for private schools match those of public schools.

That demand for accountability includes an [ongoing lawsuit that seeks to eliminate EdChoice](#) from the state’s educational portfolio. The group Vouchers Hurt Ohio is leading the effort in a court battle that has [specifically targeted Huffman for answers](#) on the process of passing legislative measures that support and fund EdChoice.

Eric Brown, former Ohio Supreme Court chief justice and chair of the steering committee for Vouchers Hurt Ohio, said the group “never trusted that state lawmakers would fully fund public schools.”

“Instead they are intent on giving refunds and rebates to wealthy families to pay for private schools and forcing homeowners and taxpayers to pay more for their local public schools,” Brown said in a statement. “We believe this system is unsustainable and unconstitutional.”

DiMauro acknowledged that the Fair School Funding Plan will require inputting the real costs on an ongoing basis to account for inflation, and having the funding method keep up with those costs, but to do so would only be keeping up with what the constitution asks of state leaders, he said.

“It means finally having a system that will meet the requirements of the constitution and serve the needs of the nearly 90% of students who are in our public schools,” DiMauro said.

Aaron Churchill, Ohio research director for charter school advocates The Fordham Institute, said the cost of the Cupp-Patterson plan is “something that the legislature is just going to have to grapple with over the longterm.”

Charter schools in Ohio have “long been underfunded,” Churchill said, and the fact that public school enrollment has seen a decline in recent years shows that public schools “should have less need for funding” but also more focus on putting the funding “where the needs are the greatest.”

“Our school funding should be driven by enrollment and head counts,” Churchill said. “There’s a lot of money going to our public schools, so the dollars are going even further than they would if our state had a growing student population.”

The enrollment in public schools has gone down slightly over the past few years, though some experts attribute that to a [national decline in birth rates](#) more than participation choices. The National Center for Education Statistics sets projections for enrollment, and estimates Ohio’s public school student enrollment will go down by 7.6% by 2031, a loss of more than 127,000 students.

The most recent data from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce showed more than 1.75 million students in public schools, versus 173,156 students in the state’s non-public schools.

The public school numbers showed a loss of 5,400 students compared to numbers reported by the ODEW in fiscal year 2023. That’s down from 2022 as well, but public schools saw an increase of nearly 18,000 students between 2021 and 2022, according to state data.

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Non-public schools have seen gradual increases since fiscal year 2021, when enrollment was reported at 162,917.

Still, in the 2022-2023 school year, the [ODEW reported](#) 88% of schools in Ohio were traditional public schools, followed by community schools at 9.4% and vocational schools at 2.1%.