

Jan Resseger weighs in on Speaker Huffman's "unsustainable" declaration.

Jan Resseger's [January 14 blog](#) lists some responses of journalists and others to Speaker Huffman's proclamation that the final phase-in of the Cupp/Patterson Fair School Funding Plan is "unsustainable".

Huffman's proclamation created a firestorm of negative responses from various public school advocates and journalists. But then he seems to be the ultimate political power broker in Ohio. Even the Governor seems to cower as Huffman issues edicts and assertions.

Ohio House Speaker Matt Huffman Declares Fair School Funding Plan "Unsustainable"

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The 136th Ohio General Assembly—again supermajority GOP— convened this week, and already the news is ominous for the state's public schools. The *Columbus Dispatch's* [Jessie Balmert reports](#): "Lawmakers picked (Matt) Huffman, who recently served four years as Ohio Senate president before winning a House seat, to lead the House for the next two years." Huffman, term limited in the Ohio Senate, ran successfully for a House seat in November's election.

The *Plain Dealer's* [Jeremy Pelzer adds](#): "(W)ith Monday's election of state Rep. Matt Huffman... as House speaker and state Sen. Rob McColley... a Huffman acolyte, as Senate president, several Republicans have said they expect the legislature will be far more effective this session... than during the last two years, when GOP infighting contributed to a historically unproductive session."

"Dangerous" rather than "effective" likely better describes the new legislature under Huffman's control.

Balmert continues: "What can Ohioans expect from Huffman's speakership? He backs school choice, including taxpayer-funded vouchers for children to attend private schools; lowering the state's income tax; changing higher education, including eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion programs...."

With a new legislature that is more securely locked under the thumb of Matt Huffman, the news about public school funding that emerged this week shouldn't be surprising despite that it is pretty sad. Reporting for both the [Ohio Capital Journal](#) and [WEWS, Channel 5 News](#) in Cleveland, Morgan Trau broke the story: "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... a champion of sending taxpayer dollars to private schools through the EdChoice voucher system, questions how well public schools are spending their money."

Although Huffman brags about his universal voucher program as the state's primary achievement during the current budget cycle, there is plenty of evidence that the vouchers are mostly being used by middle and upper income families whose children have been enrolled already in private and parochial schools. Trau adds some details: "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... But the number of students enrolled in private schools during the 2023-24 school year only increased by 3,719 according to the Ohio Department of Education & Workforce."

The *Ohio Capital Journal's* [Susan Tebban puts](#) these numbers into greater perspective: "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."

A six-year phase-in (three biennial budget cycles) of the Cupp-Patterson Fair School Funding Plan, a painstakingly designed, new state school funding formula—calculated to consider the actual cost of the services public schools are required to provide—was begun in the state budget passed in 2021. Trau explains: "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.”

The Ohio Legislature could, of course have enacted the new school funding plan in one stand-alone bill in 2021, but legislative leaders led by Senate President Matt Huffman have always insisted on a phase-in that would let the legislature off the hook in case of a sudden shortage of state revenue.

Now, this week, Huffman claims the revenue shortage has arrived. Trau explains further: “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 General Assembly 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... 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.”

Last year’s House Speaker, State Rep. Jason Stephens, Huffman’s fellow Republican and an opponent of Huffman’s on this issue, was squeezed out when Huffman ran for a House seat and became Speaker. Trau describes former Speaker Stephens’ point of view on public school funding: “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 told me.”

There is a state revenue shortage problem today as the Ohio Legislature begins negotiations on the biennial FY26-27 biennial state budget, which must be passed by June 30, 2025. But Huffman’s priorities are largely responsible. The first problem is Huffman’s devotion to his primary goal: the massive expansion in the current state budget of the EdChoice universal school voucher system that is costing the state a billion dollars every year from the same “School Foundation” budget that funds the public schools.

There is also a second complication caused by Huffman’s goal of reducing state taxes. In a report released in October, [The Great Ohio Tax Shift](#), Policy Matters Ohio’s Bailey Williams shows that Ohio’s new billion dollar private school tuition voucher expansion is not the only factor that has reduced the state’s available revenue. For two decades now, legislators have been cutting taxes and reducing the state’s capacity to invest in public services, including public schools. According to Williams’ report, in the two decades from 2005 and 2025, the Ohio Legislature’s persistent tax cutting has resulted in “a loss of about \$12.8 billion a year in revenue that could otherwise be used to meet the needs of Ohioans.”

For *WEWS, Channel 5 News* in Cleveland, [Morgan Trau followed up](#). She reported late Friday that she has been contacted by a number of Republican members of the Ohio House who, after hearing this week from myriad constituents, have decided they are not in accord with Speaker Huffman’s view that fair public school funding is unsustainable. Public school finance has been a fraught topic in Ohio for decades, and the debate Speaker Huffman has launched early in January will likely rage throughout the six month state budget debate. We shall have to watch whether public sentiment can threaten Huffman’s power.

It is worth thinking about the words of the [1851, Ohio Constitution, Article VI, Section 2](#): “The General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state.