

Ohio Capital Journal's Marilou Johanek weighs in on Huffman's plan to throw public common schools under the bus.

Johanek's [January 14 article](#) describing Huffman's contempt for the public common school system ends with the statements, "But Huffman is laying the ground to shave *more* off the FSFP and showing his utter indifference to the acute financial challenges facing countless districts. Tough luck for the nearly 90% of Ohio students who attend public schools with slashed opportunities. It didn't take long."

The leaders of the 136th General Assembly will test whether or not Ohioans believe as the Constitution of Ohio states that "all political power is inherent in the people." (Article I, section 2)

Ohio Republicans start the year by throwing public education under the school bus

Marilou Johanek

January 14, 2025 4:30 am

It didn't take long. The new legislative session began in Columbus with Republican chieftains in the state throwing the future of public education in Ohio under the school bus.

First it was the billion-dollar voucher king, Ohio House Speaker Matt Huffman, to hedge his bets on giving Ohio's 611 school districts what they need to provide a quality education to the 1.7 million students they serve.

Then it was Huffman's patsy in the executive branch, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, who added his two cents worth of wishy-washy about how a leaner state budget ahead means something's gotta give — like fully funding the education system used by the vast majority of Ohio families and their children. "Sometimes these are very, very difficult, difficult choices," said the gutless wonder. What leadership.

Educating future generations of Ohioans with high-quality public schools is *your job*, governor. It's the No. 1 responsibility of the state to ensure a thorough and efficient system of funding for public schools. 'Says so right in the Ohio Constitution. It also says, "no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, control of, any part of the school funds of this state." But DeWine and his puppet master in the Ohio House ignored that part years ago when the state began diverting hundreds of millions of education funds to private and mostly religious schools.

Clearly, the politicians calling the shots in state government have no regard for the state constitution. Adhering to the rule of law is optional when political power is absolute. Huffman, who thumbed his nose at the Ohio Constitution on fair redistricting (to pull off even more egregious gerrymandering in legislative and congressional districts) is doing the same thing on adequately funding public education.

He's looking to cut revenue to public schools while spending a ton of tax dollars on private school vouchers — with aspirations to fund more private school *facilities* to increase demand for those vouchers. Call it the Great GOP Phase-out of Public Education. Last week, Huffman dropped a calculated bombshell to prepare Ohio's public-school districts for another financial hit from the state.

The Lima Republican said the state couldn't afford to fully fund public schools or finally fix a school funding formula ruled unconstitutional *nearly three decades ago*. The Ohio Supreme Court's 1997 ruling said the state's failure to provide and distribute sufficient resources for public education and its over-reliance on local property taxes to cover that shortcoming violated the law.

Yet Ohio lawmakers never remedied the problem. School districts had to keep going back to voters just to maintain and operate local schools. Homeowners carried the weight of school funding, not the state. They were/are understandably tapped out on school levies, especially as changes in property evaluations jack up tax bills.

But in 2021, after years of collaboration between former Republican Ohio House Speaker Bob Cupp, former Democratic state Rep. John Patterson and scores of public education stakeholders, Ohio came close to meeting its constitutional obligation of ensuring a thorough and efficient system of funding for public schools. “What we really wanted to do was figure out what it really costs to educate a student and then what a district can really do to support its fair share, and then the state would compensate with the rest,” said Patterson.

The Cupp-Patterson spending formula, known as the Fair School Funding Plan, was enacted as part of the 2021-23 state budget. The new system weighed a district’s expenses to come up with the base per-pupil funding amount — instead of a blanket amount of state funding for all schools — and changed the way the local community’s share was measured depending on property tax value and the income of local residents.

That was a big deal and a significant step forward to address the long-running inequities of an unconstitutional school funding system that had failed generations of K-12 students. The quality of their education often depended on where they lived. Wealthy school districts in Ohio had every advantage over high poverty districts that struggled to pay for even basics in the classroom.

The Fair School Funding Plan initiated a level of fairness and reliability in state support that past spending programs lacked. Complete state funding of the FSFP (around \$2 billion altogether) was to be phased in over a six-year period through two-year budget cycles. The goal was to continue expanding state funding for districts in successive biennial state budgets until the Fair School Funding Plan was fully funded.

The last installation, or third phase, was to be paid in full in the upcoming 2026-2027 operating budget. But that expectation hit a wall when Huffman nixed increased spending to public schools as “unsustainable.”

His excuses for not making good on fully funding Cupp-Patterson — less state revenue to work with, less federal pandemic relief money, more scrutiny needed for school money already allocate — don’t apply to his expansive voucher outlays to religious schools that reached \$966.2 million for the 2023-2024 school year. *Enough to fully fund Fair School Funding Plan.*

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