

Michael Douglas, retired opinion editor, opines regarding the House Speaker's stance on public school funding.

Michael Douglas, long-time opinion editor for the Akron Beacon Journal (now retired), in a Record-Courier column, weighed in on the Speaker's declaration of slashing school district funding. The Speaker's pronouncement has caught the attention of a lot of folks, including some of his caucus members. Ohioans are becoming aware that the Speaker is putting a super high priority on school privatization at the expense of the constitutionally required public common school system.

Ohio House Speaker Matt Huffman wants to wreck compromise, slash school funding | Opinion

Michael Douglas

Retired opinion editor

Matt Huffman often appears the model of restraint — composed, reasoned, serious in tone. The former Ohio Senate president and now House speaker portrays himself as ready to reach across the aisle, especially in matters of much consequence for the state.

Don't be fooled.

Consider the way Huffman disrupted the bipartisan approach to redistricting reform, overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2015 and 2018. He campaigned for the changes along side Vernon Sykes, an Akron Democrat. Then, when the moment came to redraw district lines, he played the severe partisan.

He blew up the compromise, engineering maps that again secured highly gerrymandered districts for Republicans. More, he did so in defiance of a bipartisanship majority of the Ohio Supreme Court.

Now, Huffman has signaled his wish to wreck another significant compromise — the Cupp-Patterson plan for funding public schools. The speaker recently told reporters that the third phase of the plan, designed to ensure full funding, is “unsustainable.” A few days later, after school officials and others howled, he doubled down, describing the approach as “a fantasy.”

Huffman eyes slashing school funding by \$650 million in the next state budget.

Recall what Cupp-Patterson represents. The Fair School Funding Plan, as the plan is more formally known, advances on a front where past governors and lawmakers long have fallen short. Two former state lawmakers, Bob Cupp, a Lima Republican, and John Patterson, a Jefferson Democrat, initiated an effort for meeting the constitutional threshold of adequate and equitable funding to support a “thorough and efficient” system of common schools.

The plan isn't perfect. School districts must spend soundly. Still, the plan's achievement can be measured in the debris of past efforts since 1997, when the state high court declared the funding formula unconstitutional.

Remember the “successful schools” model of George Voinovich? Or the “building blocks” of Bob Taft? They fizzled. Ted Strickland proposed an “evidence-based” model. (All it lacked was money!) Then John Kasich talked about a “bridge” to something better, which, in the end, went nowhere.

Gov. Mike DeWine did route additional funds to disadvantaged students, addressing, in part, a glaring flaw, or where resources are critically needed in poor urban and rural districts.

For its part, Cupp-Patterson set in motion over six years and three phases an additional \$2 billion in funding. Most important, the funding formula is now more driven by the real cost of educating each student, the state stepping up to help address differences in property values and the challenges facing educators.

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Studies show that it may require as much as one-third more to provide a disadvantaged student with the necessary education.

This is the generational achievement Huffman would abandon. Why? Among other things, he points to the expiration of federal pandemic assistance squeezing the state budget. He also argues that one state legislature has no business dictating spending decisions to its successors.

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