

Ohio legislatures have generally shortchanged the poor in funding for education. Today it is more of the same.

The 35 delegates to the Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1802 declared protection for the “poor” with regard to education. They must have had a hunch that legislatures would tend to disfavor the “poor” with regard to education. The Constitution they produced, Article VIII, section 25, forbade laws that would prevent the “poor” from equal participation in education.

Article VIII, section 25:

That no law shall be passed to prevent the poor in the several counties and townships within this state from an equal participation in the schools, academies, colleges and universities within this state, which are endowed, in whole or in part, from the revenue arising from donations made by the United States, for the support of schools and colleges; and the doors of the said schools, academies and universities, shall be open for the reception of scholars, students and teachers, of every grade, without any distinction or preference whatever, contrary to the intent for which said donations were made.

Delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1850/1851 dropped that language but require the state to secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state (Article VI, section 2). Common schools guarantee that all students are eligible to participate on equal terms. Notwithstanding that absolute mandate to the General Assembly, lawmakers have failed to protect the poor over the years by funding public school districts by “residual budgeting” (i.e.) by appropriating funds for schools without consideration for the actual cost of education. Hence, school districts with high income and property wealth tend to be well-funded, whereas those districts with low income and property wealth tend to be starved for funding. The state’s appropriations for education typically has not been sufficient to level up the fiscal resources of low wealth districts to that of the affluent districts.

The state education budget in play for fiscal years 2026 and 2027 follow the same school funding pattern. Thus far in the state budget process, state funding is slanted toward more affluent districts and vouchers to help the higher income folk pay tuition to private schools.

The delegates to the first Constitutional Convention tried to prevent such discrimination against the “poor”!