

September 5, Guest Column in the Columbus Dispatch by William L. Phillis

Taxpayers deserve transparency and accountability from private organizations that use public money. When will state officials act on behalf of the taxpayers?

Private schools take our money; they should open their books

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These entities are not subject to public records requests. These schools escape most regulations that apply to school districts.

Your Turn

William L. Phillis

Guest columnist

The Aug. 10 Columbus Dispatch editorial by Amelia Robinson chastised the Columbus Zoo for not sharing information via public records requests.

The zoo operates as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, which receives 20% of its revenue from taxpayers.

Nonprofit organizations in Ohio have no obligation to comply with public records requests. However, zoo officials, in appreciation for the tax dollars made available, should be transparent and accountable to the public since taxpayer money is involved.

When an institution uses taxpayer funds, it should be transparent and accountable; thus, it should freely make available public information that is expected from all tax-supported bodies.

Nearly every chartered private school in Ohio receives tax funds via Nonpublic Administrative Cost Reimbursement, Auxiliary Services and school voucher funding.

In addition, school districts are required to provide private school student transportation.

The zoo and private schools have at least one thing in common

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These entities are not subject to public records requests. These schools escape most regulations that apply to school districts.

The public has no input regarding governance, curriculum, admission policies, student regulations, etc. Private schools spend tax money with absolutely no accountability to taxpayers.

Who is responsible for the state's reckless check writing to these private schools which are not accountable to the public?

Of course, state officials are responsible.

In Ohio, many state officials seem oblivious to the fact that a vast amount of public money is being spent on private education with no accountability to the public.

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These same officials seem to assume no obligation to adequately fund the constitutionally required public common school system.

The Ohio Constitution is very straightforward and clear about state responsibility for education and the constitutional prohibition of any sect, religious or secular, to control any part of the school funds of the state. The state is required to secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools and disallow tax money to private schools.

Recently, the EdChoice voucher system was ruled unconstitutional by the Common Pleas Court of Franklin County.

Even though the case is on appeal, the Ohio Constitution is very explicit that public funds are not to be paid to private schools.

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