CC4164 10.14.25 Tuesday

History of school funding in Ohio: DeRolph School Funding Lawsuit

In the late 1980's a major portion of Ohio's school facilities were totally inadequate to house high-quality education programs, and some were structurally unsafe. A congressional report indicated that Ohio had among the worst school facilities in the nation. A study of facilities funding through a state budget line-item indicated that without soft costs, such as architect fees, the cost of upgrading facilities to meet Ohio's building code would require more than $10 billion. This study did not consider the suitability of the facilities to meet Ohio's education standards.

The facility problems were especially pronounced in rural and large urban districts. But the state funding for operations was equally egregious.

The Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS) was formed in July 1988 to lobby for additional school funding in rural areas. Their lobbying efforts were largely ignored, so the leadership of this group commissioned a major school finance study to determine if the state was meeting its constitutional mandate to secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools.

Based on the results of the study, CORAS formed the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding to challenge the constitutionality of the school system that was in place at that time.

The Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding filed a suit against the state in December 1991. The Ohio Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Coalition Plaintiffs four times—in 1997, 2000, 2001, and 2002

It is of interest that then-Senator Robert Cupp (Robert Cupp has also been a member of the House of Representatives and the Ohio Supreme Court, as well as a county official) co-chaired a legislative committee on school funding that issued a report in the early 1990's. That report stated that there should be a direct relationship between the school funding formula and the cost of an adequate education, instead of the formula being funded by funds left over in the state budgeting process. The legislature at that time largely ignored the recommendation in the study report.

The Ohio Supreme Court in 1997 came to the same conclusion as the committee chaired by Senator Cupp seven years earlier.

The next part will discuss the DeRolph litigation.