

Columbus Dispatch Columnist Thomas Suddes, in his November 30 column, exposes the injustice of the raw deal the General Assembly delivered to Ohio public school students by enacting legislation that transfers the property tax problem to school districts and local communities.

Columnist Suddes points out:

1. The state's portion of school funding will be further cut. (In fiscal year 1999 the state's portion was 45.7% compared to 35% currently.)
2. The state has the constitutional responsibility to secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools.
3. The legislature is unconstitutionally subsidizing private school tuition with vouchers.
4. Reduction in the state's portion of public school funding exacerbates the inequities in school funding.

When Ohioans begin to understand that the legislature is the problem in this matter, they will tell their own legislators to serve their constituents rather than the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate.

Lawmakers sang over tax reform. I see the baloney.

Thomas Suddes

Columnist

Other than the knuckle-draggers among them, Ohio General Assembly members know headlines, not stories that run under them, are what voters remember.

So, House Speaker Matt Huffman, a Lima Republican, had to have been delighted by recent reports telling homeowners that the legislature, some Democrats included, is hammering down, or at least slowing, increases in property taxes.

Baloney. All the legislature actually did was pass the buck, as usual, to voters, to raise *more* local money for schools by passing more property tax levies – or butcher local schools' budgets. What, given voters' rage over property taxes, is likelier?

Moreover, school-tax legislation Statehouse Republicans are ballyhooing (a) will likely require *more* levy elections and (b) make them harder to pass because, hey, didn't the legislature's carnival barkers claim school taxes would *fall*, not climb?

The General Assembly's purported tax reforms will have the effect of even *further* cutting the state's share of public school budgets.

Nifty-difty ballyhoo has meant fewer programs, more levies

Howard Fleeter, the respected school-finance scholar, said in Statehouse testimony that in fiscal year 1999 — the first after Ohio's Supreme Court ruled that the General Assembly was unconstitutionally underfunding public school — the state's share of local public school costs was 45.7%.

In contrast, Fleeter estimated that the state treasury's projected share of public school costs for the fiscal year that began last July 1 is 35%.

So, over the last quarter-century, two things happened in Ohio's 600-plus school districts: slashed programs, and more levies.

To their credit, many Ohio homeowners, with and without children, invest in Ohio's future by approving levies. Trouble is, the cost of living keeps rising and, especially for older homeowners, more levies are unaffordable.

Yet the bottom line of the General Assembly's niftydifty ballyhoo is to further burden local school boards. So, it's school boards, not feckless legislators, that'll draw heat from homeowners.

Oceans of cash for private schools

Attention, honorable General Assembly members: You took an oath the day you were sworn in to uphold the Ohio Constitution.

And among other things it says "the General Assembly" – not the South Soybean school board – "shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, ... [to] ... secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools *throughout* the state."

Meanwhile, the legislature has (unconstitutionally) sluiced oceans of cash to subsidize the tuition of pupils attending non-public, often religious, K-12 schools.

(And, oh yes, our 132 states-persons are handing \$600 million in cash to the NFL's klutzes, the Cleveland Browns, for a new stadium in suburban Brook Park, amid a spaghetti bowl of highway ramps clotted with passenger traffic to and from Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.)

Ohioans are angry for a reason

Limiting schools' options for seeking tax levies will also limit a school board's options. Politically, the easiest Ohio General Assembly members, except when it

comes to defying Ohio voters' clear commitment to abortion choice and marijuana legalization, and some legislators' trashing of LGBTQ Ohioans.

Ohio homeowners have every right to be angry about a property-tax "system" that's impossible to understand unless a homeowner is a CPA.

That "system" also makes public investment in public schools grossly unequal, with pupils in well-off neighborhoods receiving far more public support than, say, K-12 pupils in Appalachian Ohio. That's not only unconstitutional; it's also flat-out wrong. An Ohioan is an Ohioan in the eyes of school law and the state constitution, or should be. But a school funding setup that hinges on real estate values undermines that pupil-to-pupil parity.

For example, in the Columbus region's booming New Albany-Plain Local Schools, 1 mill of property tax yields \$345 per pupil. But in Pike County's Eastern Local district, which includes parts of Jackson and Scioto counties – just one example from Appalachian Ohio – 1 mill of property tax yields \$150.

Yet pupils in suburban Columbus, and in the hills south of Columbus, are all Ohioans, guaranteed a thorough and efficient education by the state constitution.

Are pupils in both districts likely getting the equal opportunities Ohio constitutionally promises all is children?

No: And the quartet of purported property tax cuts passed by the General Assembly can only worsen those inequities.

Legislators sang the "Hallelujah" chorus. Ohioans who know better heard a dirge.

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