

**The December 12 Columbus Dispatch column, 'Ohio's systemic corruption risks schools, those in need,' refers to school vouchers as "the huge wealth siphon from the under-resourced to the comfortable."—Well stated!**

Several major flaws inherent in Ohio's EdChoice voucher scheme are becoming common knowledge in Ohio. One flaw that has not been fully vetted is discussed in the December 12 Columbus Dispatch column. The voucher scheme is a public policy tool to take from the poor to give to the rich. The columnist states: "Vouchers are the biggest reverse Robin Hood heist ever carried out in broad daylight."

Ohio's EdChoice voucher program distributes harm in multiple ways.

The Vouchers Hurt Ohio initiative of the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding is a challenge to the constitutionality of EdChoice vouchers. The Franklin County Court of Common Pleas agreed that vouchers hurt Ohio in a June 2025 decision.

Some background on Ohio's voucher scheme seems appropriate.

In a November 1991 speech at the Veteran's Memorial Building in Columbus, President George H.W. Bush recommended a school voucher for all students. That recommendation did not at that time play well with the general public; however, Governor George Voinovich, a private school advocate, picked up on the idea and appointed a commission to study the matter. The commission members were handpicked voucher supporters and thus issued a report that every board of education should fund a voucher to every student that wanted a private school education. That went over like a lead balloon, but Voinovich pushed the voucher agenda, convincing legislators to enact legislation that foisted a voucher pilot project on the Cleveland School District. This project was a clever way for Voinovich to get a voucher foothold in Ohio. He promoted the idea that poor kids in poverty-ridden school districts should have the opportunity to enroll in a private school just like rich kids. This project, over three decades, has morphed into a universal EdChoice voucher system wherein poor kids do not have the resources to participate.

The end result is that kids in the public school system are being grossly shortchanged to allow richer kids to continue to enroll in a private school or to initially enroll; hence a transfer of resources from the poor to the rich.

**Ohio's systemic corruption risks schools, those in need**

Your Turn

Mia Lewis

Guest columnist

'Columbus school board votes to slash jobs, close schools to save \$50M' shouts the headline in The Columbus Dispatch. Just another day in Ohio, another insane and depressing headline. I keep scrolling. I'd have to be crazy to get worked up every time I read about something backward, nonsensical or cruel.

But seriously, the Columbus City school board having to find \$50 million in cuts is all of those three: backward, nonsensical and cruel! A failure to react is a sign of deep moral exhaustion. Or maybe it's Stockholm Syndrome: When you start being able to justify the unjustifiable, you know you're fully cooked.

So, I'm going to react: What a pile of horse manure!

Everyone knows that Columbus City Schools need more money, not less. It's not a secret. It's not controversial. It's common sense. Public schools educate around 85% of children in Columbus, and roughly 90% of children statewide. Lack of funding has led not only to school closures and staffing shortages, but uncooled classrooms, disproportionate student-teacher ratios, transportation troubles and so much more. It's a shame and an embarrassment in our 'rich' city, state and country!

Watching the school board try to stretch their budget to cover the \$50 million gap is heart wrenching – like watching a car owner putting cardboard over a smashed out window. It's not an accounting exercise, it's a crime scene.

Why don't our local schools have the resources they so desperately need? What a head scratcher! Could it be the over one billion Ohio tax dollars being funneled from the public school budgets to support private schools through vouchers – the vast majority of which support parents who don't need the financial help? Could it be the decades of cuts made by the Ohio General Assembly that have taken our once proud public school system from No. 5 in the U.S. to No. 30 during the last 15 years?

It's not complicated, people. When you try to kill something – starve it, strangle it, asphyxiate it – it suffers. The question is, why do we so often find ourselves in this absurd position of watching the school board tasked with figuring out the least painful methods of starvation, amputation and deprivation?

The honest answer is, corruption. Corruption because our government has been captured by a posse of politicians who long ago stopped feeling shame and who feel no obligation to help all of their constituents. They're working for the few, not the many. Vouchers are the biggest reverse Robin Hood heist ever carried out in broad daylight.

What's incredible is that we go from day to day under the pretense that there's anything normal about the situation. Vouchers, the huge wealth siphon from the under-resourced to the comfortable, are just one example of corruption in plain sight in Ohio. Other examples abound.

Together, Ohio electricity consumers spent more than \$500 million to prop up aging coal plants, including one in Indiana. One of the biggest beneficiaries of these subsidies was American Election Power. In January the SEC announced that AEP – which has managed to fly under the radar in the House Bill 6 scandal – agreed to pay a \$19 million fine because of its \$1.2 million dark money payments in the corruption scheme as well as lies to investors. Nevertheless, in August, AEP reported record profits and is currently seeking to raise its rates. Make it make sense!

The Ohio General Assembly and Gov. Mike DeWine approved \$600 million for a new Cleveland Browns stadium. The Browns franchise is owned by billionaires Jimmy and Dee Haslam. In order to prop up billionaires, the state operating budget calls for the state to take legal ownership of \$1.7 billion in Ohioans' unclaimed funds. Other sporting complexes are seeking public dollars, including the home of the Blue Jackets. Welfare for billionaires, while support for struggling Ohio families is cut on every side.

Where am I going with this anti-corruption rant? I'm fighting against accepting the unacceptable, normalizing the abnormal and turning down the outrage when really, we need to turn it up. Maybe these words won't change anything, at least not in the short term. But I'm hoping they will help to make sure that I don't change, that my moral compass is not reset to zero – and that you will join me in refusing to turn a blind eye to the moral, financial and political corruption all around us.

*Mia Lewis is associate director at Common Cause Ohio. She is passionate about protecting the right to vote and participate meaningfully in our democracy.*

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