

In celebration of Public Education Week

Horace Mann, considered to be the father of the public common school, said that the common school is the greatest invention of man. The success of the U.S. as a leader in the world community attests to the validity of Mann's assertion. Universal public education and the vitality of the nation have a cause-and-effect correlation.

The common school in America began in the early 1800s and spread to the entire nation. The common school and democracy are inseparable. Although foes of the common system have attempted to eliminate this national jewel, the system continues to survive and thrive. In Ohio some politicians are attempting to starve the system by super-abundantly funding private and privately-operated schools at the expense of the common school system. This system will survive, in spite of the nefarious opposition.

Public Education in Ohio, as a concept, originated in the Northwest Ordinances prior to Ohio statehood in 1803.

A bit of the history of public education in Ohio is in order. Ohio was the first state carved from the Northwest Territory. Congress wrote the governance documents for the Northwest Territory. Education was a prominent feature in those documents.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1785 set aside the 16th section of each township (at that time townships had not yet been surveyed). The townships were required to be six-miles square, divided into 36 sections, each one-mile square (640 acres). Originally, Ohio had 1362 townships, each with 640 acres of land set aside for the support of public education. A total of 871,680 acres statewide, thus, was set aside for public education. Unfortunately, there was no state agency established to manage the sixteenth section lands; the result being that these sections were mismanaged, misused, and frittered away.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 stated that "schools and the means of education should forever be encouraged." The first Constitution of Ohio (1802) required that "...schools and the means of instruction shall be encouraged by legislative provision..." (Article VIII, section 3). Hence the legislature was assigned to provide for education.

Public schools were established in each township with a designated geographic area. This geographic arrangement guaranteed that all residents had access to a public school. Eventually, Ohio government required children to attend schools but allowed private school attendance as an option to meet the compulsory attendance requirement.

At one time, Ohio had in the range of 3000 school districts. Due to school district reorganization, the number of districts has been reduced to 612.

The Ohio Constitution requires the state of Ohio to secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools and to make provision by law for the organization, administration, and control of the public school system.

The common school system has served youth of every generation very well, even with a heap of neglect by state officials over the years. Local communities have supported their public common schools in spite of much neglect by state officials. In recent years, the state has been funding alternatives to the public system to the detriment of the youth who attend the traditional public system.

In spite of serious neglect by state officials, the public common school system educates in the range of 90% of Ohio youth. Local communities have stepped up to provide for the education of youth.

The public common school system has been under serious attack for more than four decades. Even so, the public system continues to serve admirably.

CC4266 2.27.26 Friday