

In an April 9 article in the [Ohio Capital Journal](#), Dan McQuigg provides an historical perspective and philosophy regarding the role of Ohio's public universities.

This communication does not take a position on the political pronouncement about consolidation of Ohio's state universities. The article is attached for the historical aspect of Ohio's state universities.

The importance of public K-12 education and higher education was expressed in Northwest Ordinances prior to the statehood of Ohio. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided for the encouragement of schools and the means of education. The 1802 Ohio Constitution required schools and the means of education by legislative decree.

The first elementary school in the Ohio Territory was established in Marietta in the early 1790s. Ohio University was established in 1804, shortly after Ohio Statehood in 1803. The last state university to be established in Ohio is Shawnee State in 1986.

Each of the 14 state universities seem to have a unique role. Ohioans are blessed to have at least one public or private university within 35 miles of their place of residence. This close proximity to higher education is advantageous to Ohioans.

[Ramaswamy wants to consolidate Ohio's universities. Ohio's founders would be appalled.](#)

Dan McQuigg

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Vivek Ramaswamy says Ohio has too many universities.

"They need to be consolidated," the Republican governor candidate recently declared. "When you consolidate them, they can actually be centers of excellence."

Here's what Ramaswamy either doesn't know or doesn't care about: Ohio already created centers of excellence in higher education over two centuries ago. They were called Ohio University and Miami University, and they were the first public universities in America established by an act of Congress.

The legislative mechanism that provided the framework for their creation was embedded in the Northwest Ordinance, the same law that created Ohio itself.

Ohio's universities weren't afterthoughts. They were conditions of statehood — part of a distinctly American idea that democracy depends on broadly accessible education.

Rev. Manasseh Cutler, a Revolutionary War chaplain, believed education should be broad, practical, and publicly accessible, not as charity but as a requirement for a functioning republic.

He helped ensure the Northwest Ordinance reserved land to endow universities.

One of the first acts of Ohio's legislature was chartering Ohio University.

Miami University followed soon after, its founding made possible by land conveyed through a federal patent signed by George Washington, part of the same early national commitment to public education.

That model expanded during the Civil War.

Ohio U.S. Sen. Benjamin F. Wade helped carry the Morrill Land-Grant Act through Congress. Signed by Abraham Lincoln, it extended the same principle: A democracy's strength depends on educating ordinary citizens in practical fields, not just training an elite class.

The 1862 Land-Grant Act is one of the clearest expressions of American exceptionalism.

It created universities dedicated to agriculture and engineering, along with classical studies, and made them accessible to ordinary citizens, not just elites.

It declared that a democracy needed educated farmers and mechanics, not just educated aristocrats.

That principle helped build the country that allowed democracy to flourish and triumph in two world wars.

Ohio's public universities weren't built to compete with each other or with private institutions. They were built to serve different regions, populations, and economic needs. That's not redundancy — that's democracy.

Ramaswamy complains about “replicas and clones.”

But tell that to Athens, where Ohio University anchors the local economy.

Tell it to Oxford, where Miami University does the same.

Tell it to Bowling Green, Kent, Toledo, Akron, Youngstown, and Wright State — all of which serve distinct populations and provide access to students who would otherwise be left out.

Ramaswamy hasn't specified which universities he'd close. That's strategic. He doesn't want to alienate voters in college towns that depend on these institutions for jobs, tax revenue, and identity.

But “consolidation” is elimination. And elimination means hollowing out communities that have relied on public universities for generations.

This isn't the first time Ramaswamy has targeted public education.

His voucher expansion proposals and his tax plan, which Innovation Ohio estimates would create a \$9.8 billion budget shortfall, follow the same logic: defund public institutions, let private alternatives expand, and call it “excellence.”

But public education in Ohio was never meant to be excellent only for those who could afford it. It was meant to be excellent because it was public — accessible to all, accountable to all, and designed to bind citizens together rather than sort them apart.

That tradition runs deep.

The Land Ordinance of 1785 set aside land to fund public schools. The Northwest Ordinance reserved land for universities. The Morrill Act built a national system of public higher education.

Step by step, Ohio and the nation invested in education as infrastructure — not a luxury, not a marketplace, but a public good.

Education wasn't charity to Ohio's founders. It was infrastructure, the mechanism by which a republic sustains itself and expands opportunity.

Ramaswamy's approach moves in the opposite direction. It treats education as a private good, as something to be optimized, reduced, and consolidated rather than a public foundation of democracy.

That perspective isn't surprising coming from someone who was educated entirely within elite private institutions far removed from the regional public universities that serve most Ohioans.

During his failed presidential campaign, Ramaswamy called Americans “lazy” and “mediocre.” Now he is running to lead a state whose universities train the engineers, nurses, teachers, and business leaders who sustain its economy.

These institutions aren't replicas. They are the fulfillment of a promise made more than two centuries ago, that Ohio would invest in education because an educated public is essential to self-government.

Ramaswamy says he loves Ohio's universities. If that's true, he has a strange way of showing it.

Consolidation doesn't create excellence, it creates scarcity. And scarcity is the opposite of what public education was designed to provide.

Ohio's founders got it right. Public universities should serve the many, not just the few. They should anchor communities, not abandon them.

And they should remain public, funded by Ohioans, governed by Ohioans, and accountable to the people they serve, because that principle is not just Ohio's history, but a core expression of what makes the American system distinct.

Ramaswamy should explain exactly which universities he wants to close, which communities he is willing to weaken, and which Ohioans he believes don't deserve access to public higher education.

Until he does, voters should understand what "consolidation" really means.

It means fewer opportunities, weaker communities, and the abandonment of a founding principle that made Ohio, and in many ways, the country, what it is.