

The delegates to the Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1850/1851, and subsequently Ohioans, adopted the Constitution which requires a thorough and efficient system of common schools. State officials have violated this provision through the years and especially since 1995.

Prior to the 1850/1851 Constitutional Convention, the legislature, beginning in 1824, established a common school system; however, the system had scant structure. Public education initiatives typically rose up from local communities, as opposed to arising from state leadership. The Akron Plan of 1847 is one example of the state enacting a local initiative into law.

Except for the 3-year stint of Samuel Lewis as Superintendent of Common Schools in 1837-1840, there was no designated specific state leadership for public education until 1853.

The delegates to the 1850/1851 Constitutional Convention expressed concern, and even anger, that the legislature had grossly neglected public education. The delegates crafted and adopted language they thought would force the legislature to develop a high caliber, comprehensive system of public education throughout the state.

The language they crafted and Ohio citizens adopted to this end is: The General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state; but no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state. (Article VI, section 2)

This mandate from the people is clear and compelling: secure one thorough and efficient system and forbid public funding of private schools, particularly those of a religious character.

Beginning in 1995 state officials started a movement to establish a private school system funded with tax money that should have gone to the public common schools. Instead of providing a constitutional level of funding for the public system, state officials initiated a publicly supported private system.

This devilish departure from the Constitution has had horrific negative consequences for common school finances; however, the negative consequences for the body politic, the social order, the communities, and democracy are more pronounced.

The system of common schools required by the Constitution does more than educate children. It bonds citizens. It serves the public good. It is the engine that drives democracy and keeps politicians in check. (Some politicians don't like public common schools because an educated populace can keep politicians in line.)

Since 1995, state officials have overtly violated the Constitution by giving public tax funds to private individuals and private schools, contrary to the Constitution and common sense.