

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

February 23, 2009

Much has been written and said regarding Governor Strickland's educational reform plan. This plan is different from previous legislative proposals. The governor's plan is not just a funding model. It is linked to the question - what does it take to dramatically improve student performance? Governor Strickland wants to shift Ohio's public school systems to an "evidence based" model, which according to the governor identifies the critical components of a quality education. He then wants to increase state funding to support school systems in order to provide adequate funds for the needs of every student. This model was first introduced by Allan Odden, an education professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Along with his colleague Lawrence Picus at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) the pair conducted research to document programs and approaches that significantly improved student achievement. From this research they identified "best practices" and made recommendations to implement school improvement. The following link reveals the findings of Odden and Picus as part of what they call the "evidence based" model -

http://www.nysut.org/files/nysut_gap_071026_Odden.pdf

One concern raised by Odden and Picus is proper use of increased funds by school districts. Unfortunately in their research not all districts used funding as intended according to the "evidence based" model. Governor Strickland is proposing that Ohio districts create spending plans approved by the state, and that the state conduct audits to determine whether funds were spent as intended. I like this philosophy of tying school accountability and funding together. It creates transparency for everyone, including taxpayers, identifying where and how dollars are spent.

There undoubtedly is a price tag associated with the governor's plans for education reform. The governor's policy team advises everyone to set aside what you already know about school funding and keep an open mind. I am impressed with the governor's efforts to place education as the top priority in his budget. Still with state revenues down, how will this new education plan be funded? The governor touts that the average amount of state aid will increase from 52% to 55%. What does this mean for the Wayne Local Schools which currently only receives 37% state funding? Early analysis on the first two years of his funding plan reveal that the Wayne Local Schools will not see significant increases in state funding; As things stand now, in the first year we will receive no additional funding from the state and in year two we will see a 1% increase.

The silver lining to this analysis is that we should not see a decrease in state funding. Prior to the governor's reform announcement, everything pointed to the Wayne Local Schools losing state funding. Flat-lined funding in our financial forecast clearly establishes our means as we make decisions. The issue will be if the state mandates additional hires as recommended in the "evidence based" model and does not provide sufficient funding; if that occurs this plan will be no different from any other "unfunded mandate" that we have seen over the years.

Ohio is now in line to become the third state to adopt a form of the “evidence-based” model for school funding under the governor’s plan. Allan Odden reveals that to his knowledge Arkansas and Wyoming have implemented versions of his model.

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