

Blue Ribbon Task Force Final Report
Joint Statement by Education Representatives
February 2, 2005

The following individuals served on the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Financing Student Success as representatives for education. This joint statement was prepared by them.

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As education representatives on the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Financing Student Success, we appreciate the opportunity to serve on the Task Force. The Task Force report represents important work — hours of research and deliberation on the part of many dedicated individuals, our colleagues on the Task Force and the Task Force staff. We thank Governor Taft for convening the group.

The Task Force report forms a foundation for much needed improvements to the education financing system in Ohio. If the Task Force recommendations are implemented, the funding system will be better than what currently exists. The report acknowledges that additional state investments will be needed over time to help all students achieve academic success. We will work to build upon these recommendations in those areas that we believe require further development. This important work must be expanded and continued.

It will take time to implement and expand these recommendations. Many school districts in Ohio that are already facing a funding crisis will not see short-term relief. Teachers and other staff are being cut, curricula are being reduced, and programs that help students are being eliminated. Students in Ohio are not getting the educational opportunities they deserve, and the state's economy will suffer as a result. Ohio is at risk of slowing down or even losing the solid progress we are making in student achievement. Our organizations plan to work vigorously with the Governor and the General Assembly in the coming budget process to address the short term needs of schools.

We hope the Task Force report can serve as a reminder in the coming months of the important role education plays within the context of the state's economy. A well-educated workforce is crucial to a successful economy. One of the major recommendations in the Task Force report addresses the problems that occur when large numbers of disadvantaged students attend a school district. Strengthening the education system will not only help those students, it will address other economic issues that face Ohio.

We plan to use the work that has been done by the Task Force as a stepping stone to the next phase of the school funding debate with the Governor and the General Assembly.

A Good Foundation

The recommendations of the Task Force represent a good foundation for the reforming of education finance in Ohio. The work of the Task Force resulted in greater understanding and cooperation among a diverse group of legislative, business and education leaders. Progress was made on some key issues.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force has made two significant recommendations:

- Solving phantom revenue and making the school funding formula work.
- Allowing reasonable growth, both in the formula and the local share of the formula, with caps to protect property owners from unrestricted growth in real estate taxes.

These two recommendations were designed to help schools reduce the frequency and size of school levies. They also serve to provide greater predictability and reliability in the funding support for schools — and some reduction in complexity. We believe these are important and significant improvements.

Other important items contained in the final Task Force report include:

- The formula for base cost would have evidence-based inputs added to it, and would grow over time based on realistic inflation factors.
- Additional funding would be directed at the needs of disadvantaged students, including added funds for intervention. These funds would be tied to the base cost figure and grow accordingly.
- Full funding would be provided for Parity Aid, and special education weights would be funded at 100%.
- The Task Force also supports the continued use of Average Daily Membership (ADM) and a return to three-year averaging of enrollments for districts experiencing enrollment declines.
- The recommendations also include partial protection for school districts for future losses in personal tangible property value.
- The report states the need for tax reform in Ohio and that it should be done in such a way that does not harm schools.

The Unfinished Agenda

The final report does not describe a complete overhaul of our school funding system — a funding system that meets the needs of all students in Ohio. Several issues merit further development and research.

- Continuing consideration should be given to research-based practices that must form the basis for determining the appropriate costs associated with educating students. We must determine the educational approaches that must be provided so that every student, regardless of where they live or go to school, can be given the opportunity to achieve success.
- The funding mechanisms and the oversight of the quality of community schools deserves scrutiny to ensure that consumers are not misled, and that funds spent on educating students in these settings are spent well.
- The need for a greater investment in technology and the effective use of that technology must be carefully considered.
- Special education weights should be reviewed to make sure the needs of disabled students are met based on the current special education standards and requirements.

As the legislature considers the Task Force report, great care should be taken to do no harm to school districts as new programs are put in place and the state's education priorities are adjusted. The ability for individual school districts to maintain the quality of education their students receive should not be compromised. Additionally, it should be viewed as a "package" and not a menu of options to choose from — even though some recommendations will take time to implement.

Commitment to Proceed

The Final Report of the Task Force contains positive changes that can serve as building blocks for further discussion and development of a sound school funding system for Ohio.

We remain dedicated to working with Ohio citizens and policymakers to make the funding of schools in Ohio a success story.

We will continue our efforts to develop and implement a new school funding system that meets the needs of Ohio's students, families and economy in the 21st century. We will build on the work of the Task Force, and we will rely on the cooperation and understanding that is developing with the business community.

The education community is prepared to work with the Ohio Legislature and Governor during the next budget cycle, and beyond, to address the problems that yet challenge Ohio's schools.

We are committed to proceed.