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Flawed data found in national report on Ohio school-funding equity

The Ohio Education Policy Institute (OEPI) has concluded that a recent report issued by The Education Trust, a nationally recognized education advocacy group, overstates the equity in Ohio's school-funding system. That report concluded that Ohio was No. 2 in the United States in equity funding between high-poverty and wealthy students and No. 1 in its equitable funding treatment of minority students.

Ohio's three statewide education management organizations commissioned OEPI consultant Dr. Howard Fleeter, Ohio's foremost school-funding expert, to analyze and verify the report's findings. Those organizations are the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA), Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) and Ohio Association of School Business Officials (OASBO).

Fleeter's analysis found that the main flaw in The Education Trust funding-gap analysis is that the revenue data includes all state and local revenue that schools receive. However, the enrollment data used to compute the per-pupil revenue figures excludes charter school students, the revenue for which is included in the district totals.

As a result, the methodology The Education Trust uses artificially and incorrectly (albeit unintentionally) overstates the funding per pupil in Ohio's high-poverty urban school districts where the vast majority of students attending charter schools resides.

"While we appreciate The Education Trust's efforts to shed light on the inequities that exist among states, we wanted to be sure the data attributed to Ohio in the report are accurate," stated Dr. R. Kirk Hamilton, BASA executive director. "As we continue to work with state policymakers to secure adequate resources for meeting the educational needs of our most vulnerable students, we must have an accurate picture of Ohio's current funding system."

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OASBO Executive Director James Rowan said, “Dr. Fleeter’s analysis of The Education Trust report on funding equity found flaws in the data used to calculate the resources available to students in poverty and minority students. Because of the way Ohio counts charter school students and then deducts funding from traditional school district payments to fund them, Dr. Fleeter concluded that Ohio’s equity performance is overstated in the report.”

OSBA Chief Executive Officer Richard Lewis said, “This analysis by Dr. Fleeter shows that we cannot rest on the assumption that Ohio has done enough to ensure equity in funding for economically disadvantaged and minority students.”

A copy of the OEPI analysis is attached.