

Private Schools- Billion Dollars-Lunches–Meals and Teacher Pay

Tom Moscovic - Legislative Chair

One billion tax dollars per year will be going to private schools with no public audit

In addition to non-public administrative cost reimbursement, auxiliary services, and student transportation services, the state will be providing a billion dollars per year for private school vouchers. There is no provision in Ohio law to audit private schools. Is this the way state government should treat taxpayers? Voucher expenditures will escalate year after year and the state is giving private schools an open checkbook without any financial accountability.

It gets worse. Some state officials are planning to authorize the use of tax funds for private school facilities with no public oversight. What are state officials thinking?

Ohio taxpayers need to wake up to chicanery concocted by state officials in Ohio.

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Public school districts are highly regulated and should be highly regulated for the protection of all concerned—students, parents, taxpayers, employees, administrators, and boards of education. The regulations have been formulated to correct problems that have arisen over time. Of course, some mandates have been adopted by state officials in search of a problem that is nonexistent.

Charter school advocates tapped into the public treasury by promising better student outcomes, creativity, innovation, lower costs, etc. Three decades of experience with this experiment have shown beyond doubt that the charter promises have fallen flat on all counts.

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Ohio Democrats Introduce Ed Bills for Universal School Meals, Teacher Pay Raises

Two new education bills have been introduced by Democrats in the Ohio House: One to ensure school meals for any students who request them, and another to increase base teacher salaries to \$50,000 per year. The future of the proposed laws is uncertain with Republican supermajorities controlling both the Ohio House and Ohio Senate.

A bill introduced by state Rep. Darnell Brewer, D-Cleveland, and state Rep. Ismail Mohamed, D-Columbus, would “require public schools to provide meals and related services to students,” even beyond changes made in the latest operating budget.

“Regardless of whether a student has money to pay for a meal or owes money for earlier meals, each school district shall provide a meal to a student who requests one,” the new bill, House Bill 408, states. The bill also prohibits a requirement that a district discard a meal after it has been served “because of a student’s inability to pay for the meal or because money is owed for previously provided meals” or “publicly identify or stigmatize a student who cannot pay for a meal or who owes a meal debt.”

In 2019, a 9-year-old Ohio student’s hot lunch was taken away over a \$9.75 unpaid balance, a Uniontown family told NBC.

The bill comes after changes were made in the most recent state operating budget to provide no-cost meals to any student who qualifies for reduced-price or free meals.

After the budget was passed, advocates praised the improvements to eligibility, but said more could be done to reduce the categorization of children and the visibility of those who have meal debt.

Nearly half of Ohio’s students qualified for reduced-price or free lunches for the 2022-2023 school year, according to data from the Children’s Defense Fund of Ohio, up from 46.6% the year before.

Qualification is based on household income, and children are eligible at up to 185% of the federal poverty line.

Brewer and Mohamed’s bill also requires that districts direct “communications about a student’s meal debt to a parent or guardian and not to the student, except ... if a student inquires about that student’s meal debt.”

Teacher pay

Related

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In a separate bill, state Rep. Joe Miller, D-Amherst, seeks to increase the base teacher salary to \$50,000 per year statewide.

That would be an increase from the current base salary of \$35,000 for teachers with a bachelor’s degree. Teachers with less than a bachelor’s degree would have a base salary set at \$43,250, while teachers with five years of training but no master’s degree would start at \$51,900 and teachers with a master’s degree or higher would start at \$54,750, according to the bill, House Bill 411.

Ohio’s average teacher salary has remained lower than the U.S. average since 2014, according to an analysis by the Legislative Service Commission, which showed an 11.2% increase in Ohio salaries from fiscal year 2012 to 2021, where U.S. salaries grew by 17.9%.

A 2022 study by the Economic Policy Institute found that average weekly wages for teachers have remained “relatively flat” since 1996, with teachers making more than 14% less in Ohio when compared with other college-educated workers.

Salaries will still be determined based on years of service under the newest House bill, including a maximum of five years active military service.

Both bills are led by Democratic sponsors, meaning the way forward will be rocky in a Republican supermajority Ohio General Assembly, especially when this particular General Assembly has had a lack of legislative action reaching historic levels.

The bills still need to be assigned to a committee for consideration before public comment and possible votes can take place.