

QUOLKE'S CORNER #145
Budget Bill (HB 59) "The Art of Doublespeak"

"Doublespeak is language which pretends to communicate but doesn't. It is language which makes the bad seem good, the negative seem positive, the unpleasant seem attractive, or at least tolerable. It is language which avoids, shifts or denies responsibility; language which is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is language which conceals or prevents thought."

When it comes to the latest biennial budget, I have been at a loss to try and explain to people the connection between what the Governor and his staff promoted would be in the biennial budget and what was actually in the budget. Whoever coined the phrase "the devil is in the details" must have been reading the minds of all of us who were waiting on Governor Kasich's long awaited school funding fix. A school funding fix that all hoped would once and for all address the unconstitutionality of our current school funding system in dealing with adequate and equitable school funding. When details began leaking out in late January, leading up the highly promoted January 31st "School Funding Livestream", the phraseology that the Governor and his staff kept using raised hope that once and for all the critical issues affecting school districts in poverty, those in Appalachian districts at the heart of the DeRolph school funding case, and funding for districts with large numbers of ESL and students with disabilities would be addressed in a way that would result in an increased investment from the state. Alas...Doublespeak...Cleveland gets flat funded for two years and the Governor's staff testifies in hearings before the House education subcommittee that CMSD is actually receiving more funding than it should under this formula and that there could be a \$75 million cut in funding in the next budget cycle...DOUBLESPEAK.

When I first saw the budget amounts that are proposed for all school districts, I thought that the Governor wanted to give Eric Gordon's district more funding, but that they accidentally gave it to the wrong district. CEO Gordon's former district is Olentangy (a wealthy suburb outside of Columbus). Olentangy is proposed to see a 300+% increase in funding, while CMSD is 0%. After all of the promises made on January 31, who wouldn't think that the two districts were mixed up?

So what's next?

First, everyone must familiarize themselves with some key elements of the budget bill and the realities and effect on CMSD. Below are a number of talking points. We will be discussing these at delegate assembly this Thursday along with any updated information we get.

Second, we must engage with the district, our parents, our community partners, and our colleagues across the state and take our concerns to the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate. This budget will probably change by the time it comes up for a vote in June and we need to make sure our concerns are heard.

Third, as we began last May with our Rainy Day Fund rally, we must keep the pressure on legislators to fund HB 525 (the Cleveland Plan).

Finally, WE NEED YOU! The three steps above are going to require our members to tell their stories to state lawmakers, while partnering with parents and community members. No one can tell our story like each and every one of you.

In Union,
David

Below are talking points on HB 59.

STATE BUDGET (HB 59) INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 2013

Impact on the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD)

- The proposed budget flat-lines funding for CMSD for FY 14 and FY 15.
- The previous education budget for FY 12 and FY 13 reduced CMSD funding from the state by \$21,157,254. 67% of the CMSD budget comes from state funds. The FY 12 and FY 13 reductions in state funding lead to massive lay-offs, increased class sizes, and a reduced school day for students in K-8 schools by 50 minutes.
- CMSD has lost local revenue. Until November 2012, the Cleveland community had not passed a levy since 1996. Over the previous 42 years, there had only been 3 approved operating school levies (1970, 1983, and 1996). When the last levy was approved in 1996, tax collection rate in Cuyahoga County was 97%. Now the tax collection rate in Cuyahoga County is 76.1%.
- The tax collection rate in Cuyahoga County is a record low 76.1%. Property values in Cleveland have also been greatly reduced in the last valuation cycle. This leads to a continual loss of revenue to CMSD. Funding schools based on property tax collection has been determined unconstitutional 4 times. This continual loss of revenue and high needs of the children that attend CMSD schools leads to CMSD receiving large percentage of funding from the state.
- Under the funding formula in the Governor's proposed budget, CMSD would receive \$75 million less in state funding than they received in the last fiscal year. The "guarantee" for this fiscal year, will keep Cleveland "flat funded". This proposed budget neither addresses the issue of funding schools based on property value nor the high and unique needs of the students of CMSD.
- The proposed budget shows that CMSD would receive \$404 million. That amount is not solely for CMSD. This amount is sent to Cleveland and then must be dispersed to the charter schools in Cleveland according to the formula. This is called pass through. The pass through amount that is to be distributed to charters is expected to be about \$130 million. So, in reality CMSD is not funded at \$404 million but actually at \$274 million.
- CMSD has lost a large number of students over the last 3 years. In that same time 24 schools have been closed, close to 2000 educators have been laid off, almost 1000 positions have been permanently eliminated, and property tax collection rate has plummeted by 20.9%.

General Budget Concerns

Returning Funds

- In the proposed budget, dollars allocated for Special Education, English Language Learners (ELL), Economically Disadvantaged, and Gifted are referred to as add-ons in the proposed budget.
- If student groups such as Special Education, English Language Learners (ELL), Economically Disadvantaged, and Gifted do not show consistent progress as defined by the A-F accountability system, the proposed budget would require school districts to pay back funds received to serve these students.

Parent Trigger

- In school buildings that have been ranked on Performance Index scores in the lowest 5% of all public school buildings for three or more consecutive school years, the proposed budget allows parent trigger.
- Parents of at least 50% of students may file a petition requesting the district board of education to: 1) Reopen the school as a community school (charter school), 2) Replace 75% of the personnel related to the poor academic performance, 3) Contact with another school district or nonprofit entity, 4) Turn operation of the school over to the Ohio Department of Education.
- Parent trigger is an unproven method of school reform.