

## REFORMING OHIO'S EDUCATION MODEL

Recently, Governor Ted Strickland shared with us his plan to overhaul or reform public education in Ohio. I must say that as I close in on the end of my 34th year in public education, it seems like to have been reforming education for at least the past twenty years. At times, these plans have come down from Columbus so often that before a plan is implemented it is considered obsolete and is scrapped for the newest plan. It is hard to know whether a plan is going to work until you have enough time to adequately implement it.

I support many of the components of Governor Strickland's Reform Plan for Education in Ohio. My concern is how this is all to be paid for in our slumping economy. Let's look at all-day/everyday kindergarten as an example. The Adams County/Ohio Valley School District has operated all-day/everyday kindergarten program for several years. Unlike most districts, we receive nearly enough funding to cover the cost of an all-day kindergarten program through Poverty Based Assistance funds. However, I would surmise that there are a lot of school districts that either don't receive PBA dollars, or they don't receive enough of these funds to offset the cost of offering an all-day/everyday kindergarten program. Don't get me wrong. I totally support this kindergarten program if the dollars are there to pay for it. In fact, I would like to be so bold as to suggest to you that some form of preschool services should be available for all preschool-aged youngsters---not just a few of them. To date, I haven't seen anything mentioned in the Governor's reform plan that really addresses preschool education. As a matter of fact, public preschool funds have actually been cut this year due to Ohio's sagging economy.

Another aspect of Governor's Strickland's Overhaul or Reform Plan that is very dear to my heart is the expansion of the school year by twenty days. This would be phased in over the next ten years. Personally and professionally, I like this proposal. I realize that this slow phasing-in is related to the cost factor. Our school calendar, to a large degree, is still based around an agrarian year---even though fewer people than ever are involved in farming in 2009. The present school calendar dictates that teachers spend the first few weeks of each new school year reviewing with and catching students up on what they have forgotten during the summer months. In today's high stakes educational world, we simply can't afford to spend up to a month or more at the beginning of the school year for review and catch up. To implement this aspect of the Governor's education reform plan will be quite expensive. Therefore, I have to wonder where the money is going to come from to support this aspect of his initiative long term, and if the funding can be sustained over the long haul.

I do like and support several of the components of the Governor's educational reform plan. I just hope that by the time everyone has finished tinkering with this plan, it will still be a credible plan and not just another band-aid. I also hope that it won't contain more unfunded mandates. Funny thing, just a few weeks ago, I shared an article with our staff about Ohio's public education system being ranked sixth out of all fifty states. I thought that this report represented good news for Ohio's educators, students, parents, and school board members. Lo and behold, it appears that we are not in such great shape after all. I think that there is a saying about being able to believe what you read or hear.

I guess that it all depends on who you are listening to or whose report you are reading. This much I do know---if the automotive industry was tinkered with and overhauled with the same frequency and interest that the education industry is tinkered with and overhauled, we would have luxury sedans averaging at least 50 MPG today.

#### UPDATE ON NEW WEST UNION ELEMENTARY

In my last article, I mentioned to you that there was an easement issue with the sewer line extension project from West Union to Lloyd Road that threatens to delay the opening of the new West Union Elementary School in December of 2009. I have learned more about the situation in the past two weeks. First, the sewer line cannot be placed on the ODOT right-of-way. Second, the sewer line must be placed on the south side of SR 125 due to fiber optics and other utilities buried on the north side of the highway. Third, this sewer line extension is something that is not only needed before the new WUES can be opened; it is something that has been mandated by the Ohio EPA to address sewer problems throughout this entire area. Fourth, if the sewer line extension is not completed before August 1st, it will make it very difficult to open the new WUE in December. The new line has to be tested and permits have to be secured before the new school could be used. Fifth, there are two different property owners in dispute with the commissioners. Obviously, time is of the essence in getting this task completed so that the students and staff of WUE can move into their new building in December. Having said all of the above, it is also my understanding that negotiations are still proceeding with both property owners involved with this dispute. According to our Construction Manager, we

have about a month left to wrap up this agreement process without causing all sorts of problems to the new WUE site.

If you have any questions regarding this article, feel free to get in touch with me at 544-5586. Thank you.

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