



Charter Critics Release Study Claiming Local Taxes Subsidize Charter Schools

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The Ohio Charter School Accountability Project, a partnership between the left-leaning Innovation Ohio and the Ohio Education Association, released a new study Tuesday claiming local tax revenues are used to subsidize the cost of sending students to charter schools.

The report notes that Ohio has a formula that spells out how much state funding Ohio students should receive, with some money from state and some from local sources. It said that the formula has a flaw that results in traditional schools receiving fewer state dollars per pupil than charter schools for the same students.

“This forces districts to make up the lost state money by either raising their local taxes or cutting programs and services,” the group said.

The report notes that the average amount of money sent by the state to local school districts was \$4,149 per student. But under state law, the amount of state money deducted from a home district for charter schools last school year was \$5,745 per student, the group said. It said that amount is far more than what a school district would receive, meaning districts would have to use local funds to plug the gap or cut spending.

It gave the example of Brooklyn City Schools, which it said has 19.4 percent of state formula funding remaining after transferring funds to charter schools.

“In many cases, far more state money follows the child to the charter school than the state would have sent to the local school district for the same child,” the group said.

Steve Dyer, a former state representative with Innovation Ohio, said the report illustrates the challenge of funding charter schools without hurting those not in charter schools. He called the challenge “the real blind spot for the Legislature.”

He said there are challenges to funding charters as they have different funding structures and are not allowed to collect local levies.

Jay Arbaugh, the superintendent of Keystone Local Schools, said his district sent \$170,000 out

of the district for charter schools. He also said his district has not had a successful new levy in 21 years. He said it shouldn't be a political issue.

Greg Ring, the superintendent of Lorain County Educational Service Center, said districts in his county have lost \$2.3 million in state support. He said county surveys show citizens disagree with the practice of having local dollars make up for the loss of state funds. He said six of his county's 14 districts pay more in local dollars than is deducted from the district's state foundation on a per-pupil funding basis.

Arbaugh and Ring said they don't think most residents know how much funding is lost to other charter schools.

Darlene Chambers, the president and CEO for the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools, said the data the Ohio Charter School Accountability Project is using is flawed. She said it appears to base its calculations on all districts statewide, when most brick and mortar charter schools are located around the largest eight urban districts. Comparing those schools to the urban districts would show there isn't such a disparity as those districts have more impoverished students, leading to more per-pupil funding.

Chambers said it is more costly for a student to transfer from one traditional public school district to another than it is to transfer to a charter school.

She also criticized knowyourcharter.com, the website set up by the Ohio Charter School Accountability Project, saying that the data for traditional public schools is not as detailed as the data for charter schools.

Dyer said the website is not an attack on charter schools, but just presents the data. He said the group is trying to point out how charters are performing and how they are funded, as well as highlighting legitimate criticisms.

"All we are trying to do is inform people so better policies can be made," he said.

Both Dyer and Chambers expressed hope that there will be well-meaning charter reform, with Dyer saying he is more hopeful than ever. Chambers added that there are "bright spots in everyone's quest for quality," adding there should be good discussions all around on the topic.

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