

For your consideration, below and attached is an op-ed by Richard Ross, director of the Governor's Office of 21st Century Education, on Gov. John Kasich's [Achievement Everywhere](#) plan for Ohio schools.

Let's End Education's Version of Groundhog Day By Richard Ross, Office of the Governor

In Ohio's education community, the debate about school funding has become a biennial tradition. It's our version of Groundhog Day, a routine where we pop out of our hole every two years, talk about the way we pay for our schools in Ohio and then go back to sleep without solving much of anything. We're like bit players in *Groundhog Day*, the movie, with its endless repetition of what's happened before.

I should know that routine better than most, having spent my career in education – most recently as superintendent of Reynoldsburg Schools near Columbus. In 2008, I retired and looked forward to letting others continue the repetitive school-funding conversation when the next state budget was introduced.

Then, Groundhog Day hit. Every day is February 2 and I'm repeating the past once again. In fact, I now find myself right in the center of the conversation, having accepted an opportunity to help Governor Kasich lay out a new vision for education in our state with a focus on preparing students for success in college, careers and life.

At Reynoldsburg, I was very proud to be part of an innovative, high-achieving, highly efficient school system that put students first. Taking on my new role, as director of the Governor's Office of 21st Century Education, I looked forward to continuing my commitment to Ohio's children by building out a statewide vision for K-12 education that would make all Ohio schools more student focused and deliver better results.

Over the past year, I have been honored to help Governor Kasich tackle improvements to Ohio schools. We have successfully worked with local leaders and the Ohio General Assembly to pass sweeping reforms to turn around the Cleveland Schools. We have given strength to a once-forgotten commitment state government made to teach each and every child to read by the end of the 3rd grade. And, most recently, we have made a promise to parents and communities that we will be honest and clear with them about how their schools and districts are performing.

This week, Governor Kasich unveiled what is perhaps the most anticipated part of his education plan: a new funding formula that will ensure fair, evenhanded and common sense state support for Ohio students. I have spent more hours than I can count in the last year, listening to a lot of very smart people and former colleagues in the education community who know and understand education from a variety of perspectives, working through the details of how we strategically direct limited state dollars to fund education at the local level. For too long, we have focused state dollars on bureaucratic needs rather than funding and supporting our children.

As we developed this new plan, our goal has been to focus on how to directly impact the boys and girls who attend our schools, and to make sure that more dollars flow into the classroom to meet the needs of students to help them become successful.

This was no easy task. As a superintendent, I thought I had a grasp on the wide disparity that existed in funding Ohio's schools. I knew that the amount of money raised by one mill on property value in Reynoldsburg was not as much as one mill might raise in surrounding districts. But I had no idea of the depth of that disparity. For example, the state-required 20 mills raises only \$900 in some parts of Ohio, while those same 20 mills raise \$14,000 in others.

To help reduce this gap, the governor's plan is designed to ensure that schools will receive the same as the district with a \$250,000 per-pupil tax-base of property values at 20 mills. Only four percent of schools have a higher base. And, funding levels will be further adjusted to address those districts that have high property values, but low-income residents. In addition, no school district will receive less state funding in fiscal years 2014 and 2015 than they are currently receiving.

After ensuring that all schools have the appropriate base level of support, we addressed the growing concerns of the education community to support the needs of students in the classroom. Expanded funds will support needed aid for disabled students, early childhood programs, gifted students and those students who aren't yet proficient with the English language.

In the course of conversations with teachers, principals, and superintendents, it became very clear that schools are willing to change and think creatively to address today's challenges – especially in today's tech-savvy world. We can't solve tomorrow's problems with yesterday's solutions. That is why we have created a new \$300 million *Straight A Fund* to reward those teachers and schools who propose creative, sustainable ways to promote innovative teaching and learning or to improve efficiencies.

But, money alone cannot help our schools reach their full potential.

We need to reduce operational mandates that stifle creativity and provide our teachers and administrators with the flexibility they need to best teach the children in their district – as long as the health and safety requirements remain the top priority and the students have the knowledge base they need to graduate high school.

At the same time our schools are working to create a high-performing environment, the state will set outcome goals and expectations and show districts and their communities how they compare to their peers against important performance and efficiency benchmarks.

Ohio is in a period of significant economic growth and our future workforce depends on a strong system of schools. To meet that demand, we cannot continue to operate within the shadow that has plagued Ohio schools.

It's time to leave Groundhog Day to the groundhogs. The governor's plan shows the way. Let 2013 be the last year for this endless, repeating debate. Let's finally do what's best for Ohio's students, their schools and their parents.

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Richard Ross leads the Governor's Office of 21st Century Education. He has served as a superintendent of schools in Bryan, Ottawa and Reynoldsburg, Ohio.