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Finally, a real response to DeRolph: editorial

The issue: School funding reform

Our view: 22 years after lawsuit was filed, plan would minimize local property wealth

Mountains of number crunching will necessarily follow the unveiling of Gov. John Kasich's school funding plan Thursday. But it was immediately clear that for the first time, the state is directly addressing the disparities that led to the Ohio Supreme Court's rulings that the way the state funds schools is unconstitutional.

There is much more to Kasich's plan, including the assurance that schools would not have to do more with less in the next state budget. Funding would increase almost 6 percent and 3.2 percent, respectively, over the two years.

But the most striking feature of the plan, which Kasich calls Achievement Everywhere, is the radical change it would make in the way the state calculates the amount of money it sends to the state's 613 districts.

By calculating (and increasing) the state's "core" funding for every district except the richest 24 on a tax base equal to a district with \$250,000 in property value per student, the plan would take the wide range of local property wealth virtually out of the equation.

This was the aim of the 1991 DeRolph lawsuit that led to the court's ruling — four times — that the state relies too heavily on local property taxes to fund schools.

The rulings had no teeth.

The state did finance the lion's share of a long-overdue program of renovating and building schools, but there was minimal change in the ratio of state to local property tax funding for operating expenses. Kasich's plan would fundamentally alter the ratio.

And for the first time, districts that suffer under the double burden of low property valuations and low levels of personal income, such as Canton City and other urban districts, would receive additional help.

Kasich introduced Achievement Everywhere to an audience of school superintendents by saying that it takes politics out of school funding. But of course it isn't possible to take politics out of passing the budget.

Plenty of politicking will surface over controversial aspects of the plan such as increasing funding to charter schools and expanding the voucher program. Meanwhile, the governor and his advisers deserve credit for finally felling the elephant in the room — the one called DeRolph.

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