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THE PLAIN DEALER



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Kasich's bold school funding proposal puts Ohio on the right path

Ohio has once again started the journey to develop a new way of funding our local school districts -- a journey our state has started several times but never quite finished. This time, I believe Gov. John Kasich is bringing this journey toward the end and that his new school funding and reform plan holds great promise for providing every student's school with the resources they need to succeed.

As a former state budget director for seven years and state representative from southeast Ohio for 22 years -- who also chaired the Ohio House Finance Committee for four years -- I've been in the middle of Ohio's school funding debates for the past three decades. In that time I learned that no change is desired by some education leaders more than a change that increases funding in their district. Despite the fact that support for local schools consumes nearly one-quarter of Ohio's general revenue fund, no increase ever seems to be quite enough.

Ohio has more than 600 school districts, making it very hard to craft a formula that pleases everyone -- or even most. At the same time, Ohioans continue to move away from urban and rural areas to the suburbs, and many districts are starting to see rising property values as a result of Ohio's economic recovery. Given these facts, it was surprising that, in response to the governor's comments that his plan gives more money to poor districts and less money to rich districts, some local education leaders complained when they saw estimates that some poor districts would receive the same funds as last year while some suburban and high-wealth districts would receive increases.

The fact is that the governor's plan does exactly what he said it would do: gives poor districts more state money and rich districts less. Poor districts receive far more money per pupil than rich ones, and poor and urban districts receive more of the state's total education funds than rich ones.

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