

May 25, 2020

Dear Governor DeWine, Senator Lehner, Senator Hackett, Representative Perales, and Representative Dean:

We, as superintendents in Greene County, wish our thoughts to be known on the current school situation and ask for your consideration as we navigate through unprecedented times.

The recent budget cuts have placed an enormous burden, not only on our Greene County schools, but on every district across the state. No one asked for this pandemic. We now ask for your consideration and support on the following suggestions as educational leaders attempt to grapple with the enormity of the financial losses associated with the recent announcement of **\$300 million in cuts** to school districts.

We ask that you do more than consider these ideas. Schools in Ohio need assistance and support quickly. We request that you work with all other elected officials to pass legislation so school districts can better handle the financial crisis coming our way. To be clear, our suggestions/ideas are not for more money-- though any reprieve would be greatly appreciated-- but rather a relief of burdens and mandates that drive up educational costs while schools are simultaneously being shackled with budgetary constraints:

1) Allow for school districts that have Permanent Improvement (PI) levy collections to utilize those monies to balance our budgets (*when facing deficit spending*) for the fiscal years 2021-2024. PI monies can be used only for non-operational costs. However, in light of the current crisis, it makes little sense for districts to pave parking lots while cutting educational programs or laying off staff members. Opponents will cite "voters passed these levies with the promise that resources were not to be used for operational purposes". We would contend those same voices would much rather have PI monies be legislatively transitioned to operational funds than placing additional tax levy requests on the ballots for an already strapped constituency when millions of Americans are now out of work.

2) Suspend College Credit Plus. Provide relief to districts by not requiring CCP programs be funded for the fiscal years 2021-2024. Students may still take college coursework, but we are asking that students and their families be expected to bear the cost of this college education for the next four years. Ohioans need to remember this is COLLEGE education, and is beyond the expected mandate of K-12 schooling as required by the constitution. We believe it is reasonable, in a state-wide financial crisis, that schools be released from this excess cost at least for this duration if not longer.

3) Ohio must consider an absolute cap on the cost of educating a child. As an example, Cedar Cliff has five children who get on a bus every morning and travel to special programs outside of Cedarville. The total cost for these five children-is \$350,000. One student alone costs the

district \$150,000. We do not at all begrudge the student, the student's needs, or the family's desire to get the best for their child. We do ask for historical context. Prior to Ohio Governor Taft's tenure, the cost of specialized programs was not put on K-12 public school districts. Many students in Ohio attend special programs, and most taxpayers do not realize that the burden of cost for the programs falls to the local school district. Yes, there is a *catastrophic cost program* in place. However, this does not come close to covering the costs associated with high needs students. It has historically paid (roughly) **.32 on the dollar**. Using the example above, Cedar Cliff is still responsible for over \$100,000 in costs. We believe that legislation should cap the cost a district pays for any student at \$60,000. It seems only reasonable that Ohio, as a state, bear the excess cost of Ohio's most vulnerable children especially since federal law also requires districts to educate these students to the age of 22.

4) Put off any funding increases in the EdChoice program for at least three fiscal years. While this debate can and will wage on, we think it only prudent that the expansion of any program be put on hiatus until the economy is better suited to creating more options.

5) Eliminate *ALL* competitive Ohio grants for the next three fiscal years. These grants create more "hoop-jumping" for schools, and it makes little sense and is an exercise in futility for districts to "have to compete" for scraps when Ohio is in a budgetary crisis. Districts like most in Greene County do not have grant writers or administrators with this responsibility and are, therefore, at an inherent disadvantage. We ask that you exercise your political clout and press for the funding in any competitive grant to be sent to Ohio school districts on a per-student basis with no strings attached or expenditure requirements.

6) Waive accountability measures such as state report cards, including state testing, gifted inputs, 3rd Grade Reading Guarantee, Prepared for Success, etc..., and state diagnostic testing for the 2020-21 school-year and possibly beyond. Allowing districts to focus decisions on the safety and well-being of students and staff. It will eliminate the worry of how school closures or schedule configurations due to COVID-19 guidelines will impact these report card items.

7) Waive the excessive reporting that districts are required to do in EMIS. Extra work within EMIS ultimately creates more work for administrators and staff. For example, there has been discussion among EMIS coordinators at the state/local level about how we will report whether we have online/blended/in person learning for next year. This will cause EMIS coordinators unnecessary work. Streamline and eliminate any type of unnecessary reporting.

8) Return to the 8-4 (8 special education and 4 "typical" education students) preschool classroom model. The current 6-6 model is too expensive. With the financial issues we are now facing, we believe it is necessary to make this change. With the pandemic, some parents may opt out of preschool this fall. School districts will need flexibility in order to meet the needs of special education services for those they are required to serve.

9) Allow K-6 teachers to teach *any* subject for the coming school-year(s), so we may have self-contained classrooms if needed to help contain the spread of the virus and germs. This

provides more flexibility and consistency if closures were to occur again. Create more flexibility for licensure for all teaching staff including substitute teachers-- where we already have a shortage. This is likely to worsen this coming year.

10) Waive the 15 hours of required professional development for teachers of gifted students and extend deadlines/give flexibility for gifted testing.

11) Work with the federal government to provide relief and flexibility to all schools around special education requirements. Allow schools to have the coming school year to make up ground that students might have lost due to COVID-19 before requiring any type of compensatory services. The argument can be made that typical students have also "lost ground" in light of the school closures. Schools across the state have made a good faith effort to provide education to all students and have been very creative in providing special services to the students on IEPs. The State of Ohio must fight for some sort of reprieve in the area of special education.

12) Continue for the 2020-21 school-year the flexibility to count distance/remote learning the same as if we were physically in school.

13) Suspend the attendance requirements from HB 410 for the 2020-21 school-year.

14) Determine a way to alleviate transportation issues for school districts. There will be no easy way to create space on a bus that will allow for social distancing.

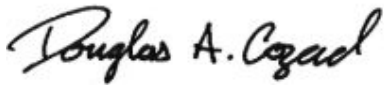
15) Create a document that all districts in Ohio may use to have parents sign if they are sending their child to school-- a waiver, so to speak, that they understand that there are risks involved, and they cannot hold the school responsible for exposure to communicable diseases. Create one for staff, too. This will help all districts as they move forward into the next school year and will alleviate each district having an attorney do one -- that looks different from one school to the next.

16) Allow for fewer hours in a school-year for 2020-21. Allow districts to get in more professional development to prepare for any situation that may arise-- including more training for online learning and platforms, and best practices in blended learning approaches. While we were able to pull this off as well as can be expected in the spring of 2020, we can certainly use some more time in August to get staff to the next level moving forward. Some districts may not need this time, but others will. A range of hours would be appreciated for the 2020-21 school year.

The State of Ohio has just made devastating reductions to our school district budgets. At the same time, the Governor has asked us to continue to educate our students. We have done this and will continue to do so no matter what August brings us. We are all planning for an array of scenarios are going to need time, money and people power in order to execute our plans. To be restrained by unnecessary requirements will only hinder our ability to be successful.

We are asking that the state temporarily eliminate the above unfunded and underfunded mandates, put a freeze on any other mandates, and continue to explore any other mandate that costs districts millions of dollars a year and places undue burdens on public schools in the State of Ohio. We believe that this collaborative effort will benefit not only the children of Ohio but also families and communities. Thank you for your attention and consideration. We wish you all the best as we move forward in these troubling times.

Respectfully submitted,



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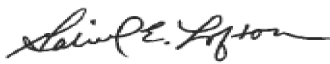
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