

Prepared Notes for Board Meeting
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Tonight, I wanted to offer a perspective on the changes to House Bill 136, not so much as an update because we've all been inundated with communications from OSBA, BASA, the Alliance for a High Quality education et. al, but as a way to spark some discussion.

When I testified against HB136, once in March and again a few months back, I had three serious objections. The first was that local tax dollars generated as a result of a local property tax levy were going to be used to pay for the vouchers, the second was that the number of vouchers, being uncapped, would result in our state funding going to zero over time and the third was the legislation provided an incentive for parents to leave the public school system, essentially bribing them to do so via the Education Scholarship fund.

In a press conference a week ago, the sponsor of HB136 announced changes that addressed all three points. The number of vouchers in any one district would be capped at 1% of enrollment, the amount of the voucher would not exceed the calculated per pupil funding the district receives from the state and the Education Scholarship fund was eliminated.

In Worthington, this limits our liability to 94 vouchers at between \$1158 and \$1471 apiece depending on whether the calculated per pupil funding excludes tuition transfer payments as it should. In any event, the maximum liability for our district would be below \$140K, or a little over one tenth of one percent of our budget. Indeed, if 94 students did take advantage of a voucher, it is hard to see how that wouldn't result in the reduction of at least one FTE, making the entire bill just about cost neutral in Worthington.

This board can still be opposed to the legislation. Indeed, I may still be opposed to the legislation once an actual bill with legislative language is produced, but our opposition would almost certainly be ideological, not financial, so let me talk about ideology here for a moment. I would put Worthington Schools up against the best private/charter schools in the state. We offer so many options for so many types of kids that if someone was looking for a comprehensive experience, it's hard to imagine they couldn't find what they are looking for in Worthington, however, I cannot make that statement about the other 613 districts. If the state wants to redefine "public education" to include the concept of private schools and charter schools, so long as they don't use local dollars, I think the competition would be healthy. That said, the competition needs to take place on a level playing field.

In my latest correspondence with the bill's sponsor, Rep. Huffman, I raised two additional points. First, it is difficult to justify some public schools using this new

expanded definition having to comply with Ohio's accountability metrics while others do not. Parents need objective measurements to make informed decisions. Second, OSBA seems to believe that the amount of the voucher, while limited to state funds, would include Rollback and Homestead. If this is correct, and I don't know that it is, it would be a deal killer for me because once again, those dollars are locally generated and I will personally oppose any attempt to divert local resources to alternative causes. In addition to these two points, I've heard two other major problems with the new proposal. Some believe that any school receiving public funds must take all kids. I respectfully disagree. A comprehensive system of public education must include small learning communities that cater to individual learning styles. We are trying to do that to some extent here, but it is easy to see a place for smaller academies catering to distinct learning styles in such a system. The second problem is that of the slippery slope and here, I concede the point that once the door is opened, the social equalizer that is public education would be in danger. Vigilance would be required, however, on balance, in my opinion the possibility for good outweighs the possibility for abuse.

My second update has to do with a new group in Worthington designed to deal with drug abuse in both kids and adults. A coalition between numerous community organizations, the Worthington and Columbus police, parents and the school district met in early December. I was pleased to see the district was well represented at that meeting. At some point, our board is going to have to face the question of what our responsibility is and how far should it go to keep kids away from both illegal drugs and unauthorized prescription drug abuse. Is random drug testing of athletes warranted? Is it possible to deal with the problem through disciplinary measures alone? If we notify the parents of suspected abuse, changes in behavior and so forth, and the parents are in denial, what is our responsibility? Should we offer additional professional development to all staff to help them spot drug abuse? At the meeting, a number of people made the point that groups like this have started and failed many times in the last decade or so but now, with the knowledge that Central Ohio has apparently become a main distribution point for some pretty potent and relatively cheap stuff, this effort must not lead to another disappointing conclusion. In conjunction with the "One leg at a time" initiative that I wrote to you about last week, perhaps Dr. Tucker can update the board early next year on Worthington's goals vis-à-vis this new task force and other culture climate initiatives.