

From: [REDACTED]
Date: March 30, 2005 12:53:22 PM EST
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fwd: Coalition Encouraged by Husted Announcement

Looks like Ohio is up for grabs. Is/can CER assist? It appears leadership there is behind the 8 ball. Cathy

From: [REDACTED]
Date: March 29, 2005 6:06:53 PM EST
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fwd: Coalition Encouraged by Husted Announcement

Anita Nelam

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Date: March 29, 2005 6:01:44 PM EST
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Subject: Re: Coalition Encouraged by Husted Announcement
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FYI, this comes from Gongwer.

HOUSE REPUBLICANS EYE EXPANSION OF VOUCHERS, CHANGES TO CHARTER SCHOOL LAWS INCLUDING RESTRICTIONS

A significant expansion of the state's school voucher program and measures to improve the accountability and restrict the growth of charter schools are among several

education funding-related changes planned by House Republicans for Governor Bob Taft's \$51.4 billion biennium budget plan.

Other proposed changes to the education portion of the budget bill (HB 66) that have solidified in recent days is the mandated pooling of health care insurance plans for schools and a new system of counting public school enrollment to waylay miscalculations that have prompted legislative budget repairs in recent years.

Speaker Jon Husted's (R-Kettering) plans for the state's "school choice" options earned both praise and criticism. The fiscal impacts of the proposals remained cloudy as of Tuesday afternoon, however, as House Republicans continued to hammer out details ahead of a Wednesday caucus meeting and next week's unveiling of a substitute bill in the Finance & Appropriations Committee.

"It's a fluid process. We're going to consider the ideas that are presented and move forward from there," Husted spokeswoman Karen Tabor said.

House Republicans are said to be still "costing out" the proposed expansion of vouchers to 18,000 students through the biennium and eventually 36,000 in the "out years."

It's safe to say, however, the program will cost significantly more than what Mr. Taft proposed. Under the governor's plan, \$9 million would be available in FY 2007 for up to 2,570 vouchers to go to students in schools that have had poor academic outcomes for three consecutive years.

The House GOP's proposed "Educational Choice Scholarship Program" would allow students enrolled for the prior year in a "resident district" in Academic Watch or Academic Emergency to apply for the vouchers, which would be funded as follows: K-grade 4 - \$4,000; grades 5-8 - \$4,500; grades 9-12 - \$5,000. The voucher costs would be adjusted annually for inflation.

Additionally, the plan calls for the expansion of the Cleveland voucher program to the 11th and 12th grades, according to the caucus.

The Ohio Federation of Teachers, which put out an earlier news release welcoming Mr. Husted's plan for increasing accountability for charter schools, wondered how the state would pay for the new vouchers and the expansion of the Cleveland program.

"There's still no proof the Cleveland voucher program does anything better for students than the traditional public schools," OFT spokeswoman Lisa Zellner said. "The public schools continue to struggle to provide adequate programs and services while the state continues to take money away for vouchers and charter schools. State programs like these are partially to blame for local property tax increases."

Mr. Husted's vision for the charter school program, for which he has played an integral part by sponsoring past legislation, is to slow down the growth until the state gets a better handle on accountability.

"We're trying to strike a balance between fiscal responsibility and educational opportunities for Ohio's kids," Ms. Tabor said. In response to criticisms on the voucher expansion, she added: "There are children who are being underserved in schools and we believe they should have the choice to move to schools that will provide them with the educational opportunities they need for success."

The House GOP's charter proposal would:

--institute a sponsorship "hard cap" on the startups at 250 for the biennium. The current cap of 225 is slated to expire July 1. The cap does not apply to "conversion" schools sponsored by local school districts.

--require proof of secure financial history and proven academic success from sponsors.

--limits the number of schools under a single sponsor to 35, requiring those that exceed the number to liquidate or find other sponsors. The plan would allow a sponsor to petition the Department of Education to increase the number to 50. The Lucas County Educational Service Center is currently the largest sponsor with 93 schools.

--place a hold on the expansion of the number of electronic-based "E-schools" - currently at 46 - while capping annual enrollment increases for the startups at 10%.

--require schools not open after a year to forfeit their charters.

--require contracts to be in place by March 15 of the prior school year except for dropout recovery programs.

--mandate that the schools open by Sept. 30.

OFT President Tom Mooney, speaking on behalf of the Coalition for Public Education, said in a statement that the federation was encouraged by the speaker's proposals given that "privately operated charter schools will receive more than \$425 million in public funding this year, yet nearly 3 in 4 charters earn the state's worst academic performance."

"We look forward to working with the House," Mr. Mooney said. "We are hopeful that Speaker Husted's announcement will begin meaningful reforms that reduce the negative impact on public school students and increase accountability for charter schools."