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# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Opinion: School funding

02.15.2013 | Faculty, Education, Culture and Society, Hot Topics

*The Dayton Daily News published on Feb. 10, 2013, an opinion piece by Barbara De Luca, an associate professor and associate dean for Graduate Education and Research in the University of Dayton's School of Education and Allied Professions, raising questions about Ohio Gov. John Kasich's school funding proposal. The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect an official University of Dayton position.*

### School funding plan is seriously flawed

By Barbara M. De Luca  
Guest columnist

In 2002, for the fourth time (some say the fifth) in five years, the Ohio Supreme Court declared the Ohio school funding system unconstitutional. One of the court's mandates was to fix the over-reliance on property tax because of unequal property values from district to district. It has taken until 2013 for the state to address this mandate, but the new school funding proposal introduced by Gov. John Kasich on Jan. 31 does just this ... *finally*.

But the proposal, from what little we know so far, has some significant flaws. It commits an unsustainable amount of money to too many districts, and it disconnects the voucher program from school performance requirements, which could decimate urban schools.

Here is the crux of the problem. Currently, a 20-mill levy in Springfield generates about \$1,480 per pupil while in Dayton, 20 mills generates about \$1,640 per pupil. At the same time, the same number of mills in Kettering brings in \$3,640 per pupil. Why? Because of the difference in property value from district to district. Of the 609 districts in Ohio in 2012, Western Local (Pike County), with the lowest property value per pupil, would generate about \$900 per pupil and Danbury Local (Ottawa County), with the highest property value per pupil, would receive about \$14,760, a difference of \$13,860, more than 15 times the per-pupil amount at Western Local.

Gov. Kasich's proposal would guarantee all districts a minimum property value of \$250,000, which would produce \$5,000 per pupil. Only 24 school districts in Ohio raise more than this on 20 mills. The state would fund the difference between the guaranteed \$5,000 and what the local district raises with its 20 mills on its actual property value per pupil. For example, Western Local would receive \$4,100 per student under the proposal and Dayton would receive about \$3,368 per student. The idea is great. However, in practice, one must ask: How long is this level of state expenditure sustainable?

The formal name I and others who study school finance use for this proposed funding model is "Guaranteed Tax Base." While I strongly support such a model, a question remains about the right level to set the guarantee. School finance experts suggest the level be set to cover at least 75 percent of the students. This would seem to meet equality goals of implementing such a program. However, with the governor's proposed plan, slightly more than 96 percent of the students (and 96 percent of the districts) in the state would be covered by the guaranteed property value. While this sounds very desirable, one must ask: Are state funds available for this level of support and if not, where will the state get the money?

Furthermore, while the money would help most districts in Ohio, the proposed voucher program could decimate our urban districts. The state's current program provides vouchers to children who attend low-performing public schools to transfer to participating chartered non-public schools. The governor's proposal would provide a voucher to any entering kindergartner whose household income is within 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (about \$31,000 for a household of two and \$47,000 for four in 2013). Each subsequent year, another grade level would be included in the plan. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a five-year average (2006-2010) of income to poverty level shows that 54.5 percent of the families in Dayton, 44 percent in Hamilton, 43.3 percent in Middletown, and 49.6 percent in Springfield were below 200 percent of the poverty level. If each family has only one child in the city public schools, the school districts could lose 43.3 percent (Middletown) to 54.5 percent (Dayton) of their students when the program is fully implemented. *Wow!*

Perhaps there is more to the voucher plan than has been revealed at this time. However, based on what has been publicized, the issue of school performance level is no longer relevant under the proposed plan. This is perplexing. This means that a

child in poverty entering kindergarten in Centerville, a district that was "Excellent with Distinction" in 2010-11, can get a voucher to go to any other participating private school regardless of the school's academic performance standing? More thought should be put into this.

There are many other parts to the proposed plan, parts that include funding students with special needs and gifted students. The proposal also includes funding the poorest 80 percent of districts (based on property value) with 5 to 15 mills worth of additional money.

While the governor's plan sounds good to many, several questions remain: Where will the state get the money? What will happen to our urban districts? Will students be permitted to leave high-performing schools to go to lower-performing ones? All of this with no conclusive evidence that more money will improve student achievement – though that is a topic for another day.