

Prepared Notes for Board Meeting

March 28, 2011

Marc A. Schare –

614 791-0067

marc9@aol.com

The state budget and SB5 have dominated the news lately but before getting to the budget and its impact on Worthington, I wanted to start today's legislative update with House Bill 136. HB136 replaces the EdChoice scholarship program with a new income-based program that allows any student that has a family income less than 2.5 times the income standard for a reduced price lunch to have access to a scholarship. As with the current program, the value of that scholarship is deducted from the state foundation of the resident school district. There is no limit on the amount of scholarships that can be offered. The program is phased in over 4 years. For this biennium, the eligible grades are Kindergarten for the 2011-2012 school year and K-4 for 2012-2013.

In addition, HB136 reconstitutes the special education scholarship program. In this incarnation, up to 5% of special education students in the state are eligible to receive these scholarships and again, the money is deducted from the state foundation of the local school district.

Obviously, there are rules, restrictions and amendments yet to come and there is even competing legislation, but I wanted to share two thoughts about the philosophy of this bill.

The first is that I believe in school choice. Competition works every time it is tried and I think that competition will make us better. I also think that most people will choose a Worthington public school experience even if the private or charter school experience is free.

The second thought is more serious and it's one which I've opined about many times over the years. The State of Ohio has every right to organize the state foundation program as it deems appropriate. The state does not, on the other hand, have the right to dictate what happens to local property tax dollars. Worthington taxpayers, in levys dating back to the 1970's have chosen to tax themselves for a very specific purpose – to offer an outstanding public school education to the children of the residents of the district. Nowhere in these levy campaigns did anyone say anything about the state taking those local dollars and giving them to parents for a private school education. If the state wants to spend its money to offer scholarships, I'll all for it but in Worthington, approximately 85-90% of the value of those scholarships will come from the local taxpayer depending on what happens to the funding formula..

In previous years, it was a fight to get the legislature to even acknowledge that local dollars are being used to pay for the scholarships. Thankfully, this year, that fact is stipulated in the fiscal notes associated with the bill. I quote:

When a district is receiving funding through a guarantee or cap, its state aid may not be responsive to changes in its ADM. For these districts, therefore, a new scholarship student may increase the district's state aid deduction without actually increasing its state aid allocation. In FY 2011, approximately 575 of the 612 districts are either on the guarantee or under the cap.

To divert local dollars to a different cause, even if it is a cause I personally believe in, is wrong and I'll fight it as hard as I can. Once the details of the Governor's proposal are out, if it remains the case that local dollars will be used to fund these scholarships, a discussion and perhaps a board resolution might be appropriate.

Speaking of the budget, it's still a little too early to panic, but preliminary numbers don't look great for high wealth districts. As Jim Betts puts it, Robin Hood is alive and well. I think the proper legislative strategy is for us to accept the loss of foundation dollars or the loss of Tangible Personal Property replacement dollars, but not both. One thing seems clear from this budget. Anyone concerned with funding of our school district should advocate against a statewide tax increase since those dollars would be redistributed somewhere else given the funding priorities implied in the blue books. It's far better to keep the money in Worthington and if necessary, generate it locally, assuming we can get the legislature to keep their hands off of that money as well.

On the bright side, HB30 passed the Senate and is now sitting with Governor Kasich, thus removing any doubt over whether we can continue our all day Kindergarten program.

On to other updates. Two weeks ago, I journeyed to Mansfield with other members of our Race to the Top team to listen to William Daggett. I first heard Mr. Daggett at Worthington Kilbourne High School in the early part of the last decade. His message was essentially the same, however, its urgency has increased. This country must reform K-12 education to focus on what matters, to take advantage of brain science, to acknowledge that technology is all around us and that "school" should be a fundamentally different experience in 2015 than it was in 1985. Failure to heed his message will result in America ceding its economic superpower status to, not surprisingly, China and India and, perhaps more surprisingly, Brazil, Panama and Vietnam.

Finally, my congratulations to the Worthington Board of Education spelling bee team for reaching the "Elite Eight". Since the current fad in educational assessment is based on year over year growth rather than raw achievement, I have no doubt that our team would receive the state designation of "Excellent with Distinction" for its annual growth in spelling bee performance. Well done, Jennifer, Julie and David.

