

Troy, Daniel

From: Jennifer Economus [jeconomus@ohioschoolboards.org]
Sent: Monday, April 19, 2010 1:40 PM
To: alopez; Troy, Daniel
Subject: OSBA Recommendations for the Ohio Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration

Attachments: localgovtcommGM.doc

TO: Anita Lopez, Co-Chair, Auditor, Lucas County
Daniel Troy, Co-Chair, Commissioner, Lake County

FROM: Jennifer Economus, Legislative Specialist

DATE: April 19, 2010

RE: **OSBA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OHIO COMMISSION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM AND COLLABORATION**

On behalf of the Ohio School Boards Association, thank you for this opportunity to provide comments and suggestions to the Ohio Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration. It has been a pleasure to be a part of the process and we look forward to working with fellow commissioners and the public as we put together the final report later this Spring. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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OSBA leads the way to educational excellence by serving Ohio's public school board members and the diverse districts they represent through superior service and creative solutions.

OSBA comments and recommendations to the Ohio Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration

OSBA does not support recommendations requiring mandatory school district consolidation.

Rationale:

There is no evidence that shows consolidations save money. In fact, some of Ohio's smallest schools spend less per pupil and per administrator than larger school districts. In August 2009, the Online Journal of Academic Leadership reported that "school consolidation produces less fiscal benefit and greater fiscal cost than it promises. While some costs, particularly administrative costs, may decline in the short run, they are replaced by other expenditures, especially for transportation and more specialized staff."

School district size alone does not define the sole qualification for success. Some of Ohio's most successful school districts are small and boast high academic performance and strong community support.

Consolidation could possibly increase labor cost for merged districts and could result in increased property taxes. The Online Journal of Academic Leadership also reported that the loss of a school negatively affects the tax base and fiscal capacity of the district. These costs are often disproportionately borne by low-income and minority communities.

School district consolidation is not a new concept in Ohio. In 1915, there were 2,674 school districts in the state. By 1935, the number of school districts had fallen to 1,986. By 1959, the number was down to 984. Today, there are 613 Ohio public school districts, excluding educational service centers and joint vocational districts.

Ohio schools have always had the option to consolidate or merge schools, as well as share administrative positions. We believe that this is a matter best determined at the local level.

OSBA supports best practices and create a clearinghouse to share best practices.

Rationale:

School districts are always seeking means of achieving cost savings and efficiencies, such as sharing transportation, special education, curriculum and staff development, along with participating in purchasing cooperatives.

Ohio educational service centers (ESCs) offer excellent examples of shared services on a regional basis. ESCs are dedicated to providing school districts with professional development, technology, support, planning and administrative services that help improve student learning, enhance the quality of instruction, expand equitable access to resources and maximize operating and fiscal efficiencies.

OSBA looks forward to analyzing the recommendations of the ESC of Central Ohio and MORPC study of sharing transportation services among Franklin County's 16 public school districts. It is expected to be released this month.

There are many other examples of long-standing efficiency efforts. For years OSBA and its partners, the Buckeye Association of School Administrators and the Ohio Association of School Business Officials, have offered pools and group purchasing for insurance, workers' compensation and electricity to offer savings to a large number of districts.

The state should facilitate a demonstration project that will serve as a model for school districts. The Greene County Schools Shared Service Delivery Project is already under way, and the group is ready to take pragmatic lessons they learned to the policy level.

The commission should contemplate developing informational and educational programs for local officials and citizens that provide relevant and useable knowledge for local officials considering collaboration. OSBA can help facilitate and foster these initiatives in conjunction with other education groups and local government associations.

OSBA supports the work of the Ohio School Funding Advisory Council regarding efficiencies.

Rationale:

The Ohio School Funding Advisory Council (OSFAC) is charged with exploring "best practices in operational efficiencies" in its recommendations of modifications to the components of Ohio's evidence-based school funding system. Specifically, the Regional Variance Subcommittee will be studying the extent to which the current educational service center system supports the purchasing of educational services and commodities.

OSFAC members represent educational practitioners and experts in their respective fields, including school administrators, school board members, teachers and parents. They understand the need to balance efficiency with academic achievement.

OSBA supports working with OSFAC in its charge to study and make recommendations on efficiencies.

Conclusion

In keeping with the charge of the Ohio Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration to develop recommendations on ways to facilitate economic development in this state, a strong education system will certainly foster economic development in Ohio. OSBA stands ready to assist in this endeavor by working with the General Assembly, the governor, other elected officials and the public to promote efficiencies while providing students with a high-quality education.