

Hello, my name is Emily Deering. I am a senior at Geneva High School of Ashtabula County. I have come to speak today to put a face and a voice on the effects of our current Ohio Education system. On behalf of myself, my peers, and future generations - we cannot withstand another funding cut to public schools. In the last six years, the Geneva Area City Schools District alone has lost a total of \$6 million dollars, roughly \$1million dollars a year. Why are our well-rounded educations being compromised? Why are our futures and dreams not as important? Why are WE worth so much less? Without this funding, schools across the state have been forced to hack their budgets. Teachers, class opportunities, sports, art programs, and various other historical extracurricular activities have been unfunded. Each year, it seems a deeper and deeper cut. As a competitive runner, I did not realize how deep until my high school was forced to cut our varsity cross-country team.

I was furious, frustrated, and personally offended that our school board would have the nerve to cut a varsity sport. Lashing out at every board meeting for over five months, the team and I blamed our loss of funding on the board's poor financial decisions and selfishness; believing they were simply looking out for their own best interests and reputations. A couple of the members, Mr. Richard Dana and Mr. Kevin Lillie, have proven to me that the problems instead originate more so at the state level. There is an element to sports and extra-curricular activities that I feel is either being misunderstood or forgotten by our state leaders. Programs like student council, philanthropy club, sports, botany, thespian, etc. are the very foundation of our democratic government. They instill within us, the values of volunteer community service, standing up for what we believe is right, and the importance of a united team.

The rigorous test preparation (which is for the most part an unfunded mandate), actual testing, and then finally demoralization as test scores now seem to dictate a student's only ability to succeed are beyond merely stressful. After experiencing firsthand how much I am defined by a number from 1-36 in the college selection process, I have placed an even greater importance on sports and extra-curricular activities. They are major stress outlets and I would even say a sanctuary for students, especially those not so heavily endowed with the greatest academic abilities. While the trouble-making quarterback may not always finish his Physics homework, his communication skills and leadership cannot be learned through any scientific equations. The camaraderie and team memories themselves are learning experiences unlike any other.

Running has become an irreplaceable part of me, and everything I stand for. It has taught me the value of time, hard work, and perseverance. There is no supplement or magic workout that can replace the pure desire to run THAT much faster or push THAT much harder in the final steps of the race. Running teaches the importance of getting things done the right way, the first time. Those who put in their greatest effort and give 100% intensity 100% of the time are the ones who realize everything they are capable of achieving. Facing failure and deflated mentalities are necessary facets, not just with running, but also life in general. These lessons of disappointment are incomparable to any textbook or high school class. Every workout is taken to the extreme and every race is run as if it is the last because each one is an opportunity to surpass goals and become victorious when it absolutely counts.

This program, this family, has undoubtedly changed my life. The friends, memories, and life lessons are irreplaceable and I could not imagine a high school career without them. We have watched each other achieve our greatest moments and been an irreplaceable support system at our worst times. This team has given me seven chances at State competition, three at National competition, a State Championship medal, five school records, and presented me with an athletic scholarship opportunity to attend NCAA Division I Ohio University. I could not have done it without such an outpouring of communal support and team dedication. Experiences like those can only be provided by a high school team.

Please feel free to stop by a Monday track workout 3pm at Spire Institute of Geneva. Let us help you understand why these programs are so important. We shoveled snow from three lanes of 400m track last week because it was decided that no one could wait any longer to begin the outdoor track season. You will never see a more goal-oriented group of individuals. I love my team.

I will not pretend to have a perfect solution, nor complete understanding of the politics behind education; however, there is at least one major change that I believe can significantly make a difference. Stop increasing funding to charter schools.

Specifically focusing on the largest, ECOT -the Electronic Classroom Of Tomorrow and its self-proclaimed CEO William Lager have received increasingly larger sums of government funds, despite their lack of almost ANY academic growth. In fact, the latest report card ranks them below a majority of traditional public schools, with a Performance Index Score of 68.1-F and a five-year graduation rate of 37.8%. This is over 25 points less than the lowest urban, Cleveland school at 63.3%. As if these figures are not disgraceful enough, it seems there may be some questionable actions at the corporate level. The following points are far more than coincidence:

- Lager claims ECOT is a non-profit organization
- Lager is additionally the self-proclaimed CEO of Altair Learning Management, which contracts, with ECOT for various reasons including recruiting, equipment, and facilities; hence, government money being funneled indirectly back into Lager's second company.
- ECOT buys its curriculum from IQ Innovations, LLC that consequently also have a self-proclaimed CEO named William Lager. Yes it the same William Lager of ECOT and Altair Learning Management.
- 2012 State audit says, "IQ Innovations, LLC and ECOT's management company, Altair Learning Management I, Inc., **have the same principal owner.**"
- State funds allocated for education are largely used to afford the services of Altair Learning Management and IQ Innovations, LLC. An estimated \$15.7 million dollars of ECOT funds are directed as payment to Lager's partner companies.
- ECOT applied for a piece of a \$250 million dollar grant from the Straight A Fund, which was created by Governor Kasich and passed by the republican legislature. They were awarded their full request \$2,951,755 in state aid by the Straight A

Fund's governing board led by Gov. Kasich, Dick Ross (state superintendent), Representative Gerald Stebelton, Andrew Brenner, and Republican State Senator Peggy Lehner. All of whom have received thousands of dollars from Lager during some point of their campaigns.

- Lager is a known massive donor to the republican party
- This Straight A Fund money is supporting an online math tool for 6-12 graders created by Lager's very own IQ Innovations

Ultimately, it is hard to deny the trending failure in charter schools. I ask you all one last time, to please look me in the eyes and explain to me why my future, why my friends' futures, and why my children's futures are worth so much less. Today I come to you not only with a passion- but also with my opinions, experiences, and hopefully the makings of a solution to this issue. I plan to do whatever it takes to ensure that future students have the same opportunities that I have earned. My name is Emily Deering and I am a proud Geneva Lady Eagle.

Thank you very much for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Citations

- 1) Mild, Greg. "Ohio's Largest Tax-payer- Funded Charter School ECOT Receives Bonus Check". *Plunderbund*. Eric Vessels, 8 December 2013. Web.
- 2) Yost, Dave. "Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow – Franklin County - Single Audit". 30 June 2012. Retrieved from:
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