

Deer Park Community City Schools

Jeff Langdon, Superintendent

Cynthia Stubenvoll, Treasurer

To Whom It May Concern:

Though we feel like the most recent budget is a step forward for education in many ways, there are a few points of concern that still exist and center around public dollars flowing to non-public schools. The idea that not only state but local dollars too can flow away from a local school district and into an almost unregulated situation is highly upsetting. We know that we provide a quality education to our students and we should be able to utilize the dollars that the community has authorized for one purpose: public education.

1) Deductions from Deer Park that divert dollars to other educational institutions, which decreases our ability to fund initiatives locally – including all day kindergarten and comprehensive preschool programs – should be corrected.

- i. Community Schools, including e-Schools and Charter Schools, have approximately 50 out of our 1303 students (ADM less JVS) – about 4% of our student population
- ii. Via the Opportunity Grant, \$1,983 comes to the district from the state
 1. \$5,800 is the base aid amount, but the base aid is reduced by the State Share Index (34.2% for us) to account for local ability to pay
- iii. Even though we receive \$1,983 in state funding, all \$5,800 goes out when a resident student enrolls in a community school
 1. This occurs as a deduction on our State Foundation payment
- iv. The result of the current setup is \$3,817 shortfall, which is made up by local dollars every time a student enrolls in a community school
 1. We know that local tax dollars are leaving because we only receive \$1,983 but \$5,800 gets taken away
- v. Total dollars lost: \$378,032
 1. In Deer Park, this results in 1.60 mills of local dollars flowing elsewhere
- b. **Proposed Solution – Fund these programs appropriately**
 - i. **If \$1,983 is received from the State, \$1,983 should be sent out**

2) Charter School Reform must be a top priority.

- a. Charter and e-Schools must be subjected to the same financial and public record standards as public school district in order to provide transparency
 - i. Charters and e-Schools are getting taxpayer dollars, in turn they should be held to the same accountability standards
- b. The current budget bill not only does little for reform, but also increases the access of Charter Schools to public dollars
 - i. \$25 million capital improvement fund for high performing Charter Schools

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1. Many public school buildings have been aging and in need of repairs or replacement for decades
 2. Many public districts are still waiting for OFCC dollars to help fund building projects
 3. Provision seems to be putting the welfare of a few above the welfare of the whole
- ii. Ability of Charter Schools to run tax levies
1. Local governmental entities have one way to make a measurable impact on their revenue creation and that is through tax levies
 2. Communities are already feeling the current tax burden, adding one more player to the mix could be detrimental

3) Expansion of EdChoice Voucher Dollars is substantially more than the increase given to public school districts.

- a. Proposal is for EdChoice vouchers to go from \$5,000 to \$5,7000, a 14% increase, while public school funding is only increased 3% (from \$5,800 to \$6,000)
- b. Again, this program ends up taking local tax dollars away from public districts because the full amount taken is not received by the state

If the intent of community schools and vouchers is to give families a choice, then it only seems proper to make sure that all schools are on the same playing field and subject to the same rules and regulations. Only when comparing apples to apples can a family truly see what the best choice is for their children.

4) High Performing District (HPD) legislation should be re-evaluated.

- a. Access for HPD to funding under the Classroom Facilities Assistance Program (CFAP) seems counterintuitive to its purpose
 - i. CFAP eligibility is based on assessed property valuation per pupil and has allowed districts in lower wealth areas the opportunity to have access to State dollars in order to help with building projects
 1. i.e. Projects that may not have happened otherwise
 - ii. To favor high performing districts over the current procedure does a disservice to the program, in addition to that fact that there is no correlation between high performing districts and building improvements
 - iii. EVERY district should have access to funds for 'technology, building expansion, and physical alterations to improve school safety or security.'
 1. Deer Park falls low on the list (513 out of 612 districts) due to higher assessed valuation (because of Sycamore Township for the most part)
 - a. Families in the City of Deer Park can't afford an extensive bond

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- issue despite what our valuation shows
2. AND if the district doesn't hit the new high performing benchmark, we get left behind

Thank you for your time and your attention! If you have any questions about the topics discussed, please feel free to contact either of us at any time.

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