



**Week of January 13, 2025**

**Speaker Huffman casts cold water on Cupp-Patterson formula**

Newly minted House Speaker **Matt Huffman** wasted no time in outlining his stance on key budgetary and education issues. Through [a press conference](#), an appearance on [an Ohio Senate podcast episode](#), and other forums, Huffman shared his thoughts on K-12 education, the school-funding formula, and broader budget priorities.

Huffman dismissed the idea of continuing the phased implementation of the Cupp-Patterson school-funding plan, saying “I don’t think there is a third phase” and labeled the plan’s spending as “unsustainable.” Huffman also argued legislators cannot legally commit funds beyond a two-year budget cycle and thus, the assumption that he would be bound to implement the final phase of the plan is “fantasy.” While calling the term “Fair School Funding Plan” a “marketing phrase,” Huffman also criticized the current plan’s costly and numerous guarantees, school districts’ historically high carryover balances, and district spending habits.

Huffman also advocated for private school vouchers as a more cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars, saying “What is the least expensive, acceptable educational product for the taxpayer? If someone says they're willing to take a \$7,000 scholarship voucher and go to a private school rather than going to the school that... on average in the state, it's about \$15,000 — that's better for the taxpayers.” Meanwhile, [the Fordham Institute](#) and [Buckeye Institute](#) – two prominent conservative think tanks – are asking lawmakers to create a poverty funding supplement for low-income voucher students.

Huffman’s remarks highlight his focus on cost-effectiveness and fiscal responsibility in education funding, setting the stage for potentially significant policy debates in the months to come. Gov. **Mike DeWine** is slated to introduce his final budget proposal to the legislature, which is expected to occur during the week of Jan. 27.

**Legislative leadership and committee chairs finalized**

**Matt Huffman** and **Rob McColley** will lead the 136th legislative session for the Ohio House of Representatives and Senate, respectively. A full Senate committee roster is [accessible here](#), and a House Republican committee roster is [available here](#). House Democrat committee announcements have yet to be announced.

Both Huffman and McColley also announced chairmanships, which are below.

- [House Finance Committee](#) – **Brian Stewart**, chair, and **Mike Dovilla**, vice chair. The remaining Republican members include Reps. **Cindy Abrams** (R), **Adam Bird** (R), **Jamie Callender** (R), **Thomas Hall** (R), **Jim Hoops** (R), **Marilyn John** (R), **Mark Johnson** (R), **Don Jones** (R), **Gayle Manning** (R), **Phil Plummer** (R), **Sharon Ray** (R), **Kevin Ritter** (R), **Bill Roemer** (R), **Jean Schmidt** (R), **Jim Thomas** (R), **Andrea White** (R), **Josh Williams** (R), **Bernie Willis** (R), and **Tom Young** (R).

- [House Education Committee](#) – **Sarah Fowler Arthur** (R), chair, and **Mike Odioso**, vice chair. The remaining Republican members include Reps. **Adam Bird** (R), **Gary Click** (R), **Don Jones** (R), **Gayle Manning** (R), **Jonathan Newman** (R), **Kevin Ritter** (R), and **Jim Thomas** (R).

- [Senate Finance Committee](#) (11 R – 3 D) – Sens. **Jerry Cirino**, chair, and **Brian Chavez**, vice chair. The remaining members include Sens. **Bill Blessing** (R), **Andrew Brenner** (R), **George Lang** (R), **Susan Manchester** (R), **Nathan Manning** (R), **Sandy O’Brien** (R), **Tom Patton** (R), **Mark Romanchuk** (R), **Shane Wilkin** (R), **Paula Hicks-Hudson** (D), **Hearcel Craig** (D), and **Cathy Ingram** (D).

- Senate Education Committee (5 R -2 D) – **Andrew Brenner**, chair, and **Bill Blessing**, vice chair. The remaining members include Sens. **Al Cutrona** (R), **Steve Huffman** (R), **Kyle Koehler** (R), **Cathy Ingram** (D), and **Kent Smith** (D).

Of the 65 House Republicans, all are either in leadership or hold the post of committee chair or vice chair, except for House Speaker **Jason Stephens** and Stephens allies **DJ Swearingen** and **Jeff LaRe**.

### **DeWine signs all lame duck education bills into law**

More than two dozen bills were signed into law on Jan. 8 by Gov. Mike DeWine. Those impacting education include [House Bill \(HB\) 8](#) (the Parents Bill of Rights and LifeWise bill), [HB 206](#) (student expulsion authority and seizure drug policies), [Senate Bill \(SB\) 163](#) (license plates for Dublin and Hilliard City Schools), [SB 208](#) (open enrollment for military families and other education changes), and [SB 234](#) (update ID cards, planners, website with 988 phone number information). All bills take effect 90 days after their signing and filing with the secretary of state, likely in mid-April.

### **Joint property tax committee issues recommendations**

The Joint Committee on Property Tax Review and Reform on Jan. 2 issued 21 recommendations on property tax changes. Several are listed below, and a copy of the report is [accessible here](#). Lawmakers indicated that many of the recommendations will be drafted as standalone pieces of legislation, and the House recently indicated their budget proposal could include some aspects of the recommendations.

Major recommendations include:

- consider increasing the number of public meetings required to be held by a taxing authority prior to levying a tax to promote transparency to taxpayers;
- consider clarifying or expanding the powers of each County Budget Commission to oversee the application and collection of voted and unvoted millage for all jurisdictions inside the county;
- consider reviewing the distribution formula for guaranteed inside millage to promote fairness based on taxing authorities' current day services and funding needs;
- consider requiring that emergency and substitute tax levies be included in the calculation of a school district's 20-mill floor and consider requiring a public hearing before changing unvoted property tax millage in order to increase revenue;
- consider reducing the maximum term and renewal options for emergency, substitute, and continuous tax levies;
- consider clarifying the terminology and narrowing the uses of emergency and substitute tax levies to prevent the use of funds for non-emergency purposes;
- consider expanding the traditional Homestead Exemption and an enhanced exemption for disabled veterans including a means-tested increase in the benefit;
- consider adopting a property tax deferral program for homeowners; and
- review the effectiveness of property tax exemption programs and evaluate the efficacy of their use and potential misuse.

### **State Board of Education selects leaders**

The State Board of Education underwent several internal changes, including the addition of nine new members and the election of leadership positions. In the race between **Paul LaRue** and **Tom Jackson**, LaRue was re-elected president by an 11-7 vote. Additionally, **Teresa Fedor** was elected vice president over **John Hagan** and **Charlotte McGuire**. LaRue plans to focus on the board's funding issues and expedite its licensure process in the new year.

### **Federal judge halts Title IX rules**

Proposed regulations to Title IX from the Biden Administration that would have prohibited discrimination on gender identity in schools were struck down by a federal court judge last week. Chief Judge **Danny Reeves** of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky, whose jurisdiction includes Ohio, issued his ruling on Jan. 9 that was lauded by Ohio elected officials, including likely gubernatorial candidate and current Attorney General **Dave Yost**.

### **Heard around the Statehouse**

“The implementing of the Cupp-Patterson plan that many believe is a fait accompli, that we decided four years ago that in this budget we’re going to do that, in my estimation, is a fantasy.” – House Speaker **Matt Huffman**, speaking to reporters about the funding formula’s prospects in 2025.

"LifeWise has experienced significant growth because families and communities realize the tremendous benefits of Bible-based character education." – **Joel Penton**, founder of LifeWise Academy, responding to [a Columbus Dispatch story](#) that reported the nonprofit organization made \$35 million in revenue last year, compared to \$2 million in 2021.