

30. Cincinnati Enquirer

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Majority of Ohio school issues win Districts feared court ruling's effect

BY MICHAEL HAWTHORNE Enquirer Columbus Bureau

COLUMBUS - Local voters were tougher on school issues than the rest of the state.

Voters endorsed 109 of 192 school levies statewide, according to the Ohio Department of Education.

The 57 percent passage rate was a bit higher than the average of 53 percent during primary elections in the past decade.

But voters in four Southwestern Ohio counties defeated nine of 16 school money issues.

Two school issues that had been defeated in November - in Milford Exempted Village Schools and Oak Hills Local Schools - won approval, but the victories took significant efforts by citizens.

"It's clear that starting in November the community made a decision to come back and support the schools,"

said Bob Nelson of Miami Township, co-chairman of the Promote Milford Schools Now campaign.

Some school officials had worried local levies would be hurt by an Ohio Supreme Court decision ordering state legislators to revamp the way schools are funded by March 24.

"I think voters are smarter than we give them credit for," said Paul Marshall, director of governmental relations for the Education Department. "Most people realize the legislature is going to deal with this problem, but we may not see results for a long time."

Mike Dawson, spokesman for Gov. George Voinovich, also credited good economic conditions for the success of many school levies.

"Education is at the forefront now, and when the economy is good, people are willing to spend more money on

services," Mr. Dawson said.

Real-estate or income-tax proposals to raise money for daily school operations generally fared well in Tuesday's elections.

Sixty-one percent of the 114 operating issues were approved, according to the Education Department.

Meanwhile, bond issues for construction and repairs were about evenly split, with 51 percent of the 76 levies passing. operations and capital improvements failed, including one sought by the Hamilton schools in Butler County.

Still, state officials were buoyed by passage of operating levies in seven of the nine school districts considered to be in financial distress.

Said Mr. Marshall: "Some of these districts are one failed levy from being in real trouble." ■

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Discipline improving in schools, report says

BY DANA DiFILIPPO The Cincinnati Enquirer

Suspensions and expulsions dropped nearly 27 percent at Cincinnati Public Schools since last year, thanks to programs the district embraced - such as Project Succeed Academy, Job Corps and Student Court - to keep kids in school, administrators said Wednesday.

Second- and third-quarter discipline reports - released Wednesday - show a 63 percent dive in expulsions in the second quarter of the school year and a 29 percent dip in expulsions in the third quarter, compared with the same quarters last year. Suspensions fell nearly 9 percent in the second quarter and 33 percent in the third quarter, compared with the same quarters last year.

The drop in discipline actions came after a steady rise in recent years that troubled teachers and parents. For example, suspensions jumped 17

percent from 1994 to 1995.

District Deputy Superintendent Lionel Brown credited last year's \$4.4 million overhaul of district discipline efforts for the drop.

"It's clear that the plan is working," he said, referring to the district's Comprehensive Discipline Plan.

The biggest boost came from Project Succeed, a year-round school for more than 300 chronically disruptive children that opened in the East End last year. It emphasizes intense academic work along with counseling and behavior modification for students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Other initiatives included more in-school suspension capabilities, more weekend and summer programs stressing academic help and behavior-changing strategies, closer work with students returning from

youth jails and classes for parents.

The Job Corps program is a job-training program for high-schoolers. And in Student Court, student jurors judge school offenders and levy punishments.

As in past years, the number of African-American students being suspended or expelled is disproportionately high.

African-American students comprised about 85 percent of those suspended and expelled in the third quarter, despite representing 68 percent of total enrollment.

Other efforts are being considered to further stem discipline problems, Mr. Brown said. They include:

Youth Build, a house-rehabilitation program targeting students returning from youth jails, has proven successful in Dayton Public Schools.

*Discipline
(see also
reverses
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Improving health care by hiring specialists to identify and treat behavioral conditions such as bipolar disorder.

Some schools have taken other tacks in addressing discipline.

At Kilgour Elementary School, teachers worked with educators from

the Center for Peace Education to learn creative ways to resolve conflicts, Principal Mary Ronan said. Peer mediation and in-school suspension programs also have been effective at the school in Mount Lookout, she said.

"This is just the first year we have seen results," Mr. Brown said. "If we

continue working to keep kids in school and off the street, they will have a greater opportunity to engage in a teaching - learning process. That could mean improved attendance, fewer drop-outs and more students reaching graduation and higher proficiency test scores." ■

32. Cincinnati Enquirer

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Tougher diplomas urged

BY MARK SKERTIC The Cincinnati Enquirer

COLUMBUS - Ohio students would have to show they know a foreign language and can operate a computer in order to earn a high school diploma, under a plan being considered by the State Board of Education.

Math, English and science requirements are also being considered for revision as part of an effort to boost graduation requirements and beef up school standards.

"Simply put, we want better results from our students, we want better results from our schools and school districts," said Gene Harris, assistant state superintendent of public instruction who helped develop the standards, during a briefing for reporters Wednesday.

The new standards are intended to set general guidelines, and intentionally don't define what a "basic," "intermediate" or an "advanced" skill levels, state officials said. Those requirements - which the state calls competencies - will be determined by groups of educators, school officials,

parents, community members and others once the new standards are accepted by the state board and lawmakers, Ms. Harris said.

The new rules would replace requirements that currently detail how much time students should spend on different subjects, but not exactly what they must learn.

"Right now, if you take an algebra course in Columbus Public Schools it may not be the same as the algebra course in Worthington City Schools," Ms. Harris said.

State officials acknowledged the new standards would present a challenge for most of the state's 611 public school districts.

Last year, just 82 met the proposed minimum performance based on proficiency exam results, according to a Department of Education analysis.

The state estimates that implementing the standards would cost about \$13 million statewide, with most of that cost coming from changes in

special education. In general, the rules would also apply to nonpublic schools

Work on revising the standards began in 1992 and they could be in place by the fall of 1998. They would replace rules adopted in 1983.

The State Board of Education will vote to accept the standards proposal in principle at its meeting Monday.

The document will then go to the General Assembly for consideration, before coming back to the state board for any additional changes.

Melanie Bates, one of the board members from Southwest Ohio, predicted the 103-page document will be accepted by the board. She has heard concerns from school superintendents that the new rules lessen local control and add too many requirements.

"This standards document is not a perfect document," she acknowledged. "But I believe if we have a document we can work with . . . then this can be modified and changed as the needs of students change." ■

Program on state standards

33. Cincinnati Enquirer

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Poll: Money's no cure-all for public-school problems

BY SANDY THEIS Enquirer Columbus Bureau

COLUMBUS - Ohio residents rate inadequate funding as the biggest problem facing public schools, but a majority believes that simply spending more money on schools won't fix what ails them, according to the latest Ohio Poll.

Thirty percent listed the lack of

funding as the schools' top problem, followed by other concerns, such as the lack of discipline (11 percent), poor quality teachers (7 percent), poor curriculum (6 percent), and funding inequities (5 percent).

Yet, when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement,

"Spending more money won't fix what's wrong with our schools," 56 percent agreed, 43 percent disagreed and 2 percent didn't know.

The Ohio Poll is sponsored by The Enquirer and the University of Cincinnati. Results are based on a random telephone survey of 861 adults