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OP-ED | Amendment 2: A Challenge to Funding, Equality, and Accountability in Kentucky's Public Schools

This November, voters across Kentucky will face a critical decision with far-reaching consequences for our public schools, communities, and children's futures. The ballot features Amendment 2. If passed, it would amend the Constitution of Kentucky to allow state leaders to support private schools with public funding.

The stakes could not be higher. Public schools in Kentucky serve over 600,000 students and are the foundation of our educational system. They strive to provide every child, regardless of their background or zip code, with the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed. Amendment 2 will alter public education's ability to provide that opportunity.

Financial Impact of Amendment 2

Amendment 2 could allow Kentucky to adopt vouchers, education savings accounts, and scholarship tax credits, which have reduced public education funding in other states. According to the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, establishing a Florida-style voucher program in our Commonwealth would cost \$1.19 billion annually. That equals the cost of employing 9,869 public school teachers and employees.

The impact would be devastating for the 14 school districts that are part of the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (OVEC) and represent rural, suburban, and urban communities – we could lose up to \$204 million in annual funding and experience the loss of 1,470 personnel.

Rural Communities Left Behind

For our rural counties, the impact would be significant. Most rural areas have few, if any, private schools. Yet under Amendment 2, taxpayers in these communities would see their hard-earned dollars funding private schools elsewhere. The local public schools, which are often the heart of these small communities, would face decreased funding. This means fewer resources for students, larger class sizes, and cuts to critical programs.

Moreover, many rural school districts are the largest employers in their communities. The loss of funding would not just harm students—it would also impact local economies, leading to potential job losses among teachers, staff, and support personnel. In rural Kentucky, where jobs are often scarce, this could be devastating.

Urban Districts Facing Loss of Students and Resources

In urban districts like Jefferson County, Amendment 2 raises equally troubling concerns. Private schools would be positioned to lure students away from public schools, further draining resources from districts that are already stretched thin. Public schools serve as pillars of support for low-income families and students with special needs, providing services and programs that many private schools are neither equipped nor obligated to offer. Losing students to private schools would only increase inequality and leave our most vulnerable children behind.

Suburban Instability

Suburban districts, such as those in Bullitt, Oldham, and Shelby Counties, face a different but no less serious threat. The introduction of a voucher system could lead to instability as families pull students out of public schools to pursue private alternatives, disrupting the balance of enrollment and budgets that public school systems rely on to operate effectively. This instability would make it harder for schools to plan for the future, hire qualified staff, and invest in the programs that make our public schools strong.

Private Schools Without Accountability

One of the most concerning aspects of Amendment 2 is the diminished accountability it creates. Public schools are held to rigorous oversight and must provide transparency on how funds are spent and how students perform. While public schools are required by law to publish key performance metrics, such as test scores, prominently on their websites for full transparency, private schools would face no such obligation. Taxpayers would be left in the dark and without any guarantee of academic standards, quality education, or even basic performance reporting. This lack of transparency is a disservice to both students and the taxpayers who fund our education system.

What's at Stake

Amendment 2 is not just a financial issue—it's about the future of education for all Kentucky children. This is why leaders across Kentucky are standing together to educate voters on the impact of Amendment 2 in our communities. Kentuckians—urban, suburban, and rural—must unite in support of our public schools. Ensuring that public dollars remain in public schools protects the future of our students.

Jason Adkins is the Chief Executive Officer of the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative, an education non-profit serving 14 school districts in North central Kentucky. Over the last 15 years, he has raised \$125 million for educational causes through grant writing and fundraising.