



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Royalton First School in County to sign up for Mandel's OhioCheckbook.com

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By Jaime Anton

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NORTH ROYALTON ‐ The school district is partnering with State Treasurer Josh Mandel to post its checkbook online as another means of being accountable and transparent with taxpayers.

It is the first school district, alongside Cuyahoga Heights Local Schools, to sign up for Mandel's OhioCheckbook.com initiative in Cuyahoga County, and the pair are ninth and tenth to do so in the state.

Mandel, flanked by State Sen. Tom Patton, North Royalton Superintendent Greg Gurka, North Royalton Treasurer Biagio Sidoti and School board members Anne Reinkober, Jackie Arendt, John Kelly and Barbara Ann Zindroski, and school officials from Cuyahoga Heights, made the announcement at a press conference hosted at the North Royalton High School on July 2.

"In this process there are going to be leaders and there are going to be followers, and I am so proud to stand up here with leaders, folks from both of these school districts who recognize the fact that their constituents have the right to know how their money is being spent. But also by virtue of them standing up here, they are proud about how they are managing the finances here," Mandel said.

It started two years ago when Mandel read a report ranking Ohio 46th in the nation in terms of government transparency.

OhioCheckbook.com launched Dec. 2 and marked the first time in state history residents could view every expenditure of the state government. Anything from a pack of pencils to millions of dollars' worth of contracts is visible going back seven years. The impetus was the belief that taxpayers have a right to know how their tax money is being spent, Mandel explained. In a time when there is great cynicism in the system, he said this initiative can restore faith in government.

"I believe strongly that our bosses are the taxpayers of Ohio. One of the best ways to empower the citizens is to give them the information and allow them to follow the money to hold politicians and other public officials accountable," he said.

In April, Mandel extended an invite to 18,062 local government and school officials ‐ cities, counties, townships, schools, library districts and other special districts ‐ representing 3,962 governments throughout the state encouraging them to do the same at no cost.

Mandel and his staff mentioned after the conference they were impressed when Gurka, Sidoti and Zindroski responded simultaneously weeks ago expressing immediate interest. Zindroski was vocal publicly about the need to sign up, too.

Financial documents are available on the school district's website, but OhioCheckbook.com will serve as another tool, Gurka said.

"OhioCheckbook.com is another method for us to utilize a cost-neutral application to continue our open dialogue with taxpayers," he said. "Our district has always been committed to financial excellence through its previous 22 years of certificates of achievement for excellence in financial reporting."

In the six months OhioCheckbook.com has existed, it has been searched more than 250,000 times, and the state is now ranked first in government transparency.

Transparency is a buzz word lately. A community survey conducted recently here revealed North Royalton residents do not trust the school district to spend their money.

School officials hope this partnership will go a long way in restoring some of the lost trust.

"It's nice the state is giving us a different opportunity to share our financial information with our constituents, in addition to what we



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are doing," Reinkober said.

Mandel said Patton was one of the supporters who wanted to see the program through and make sure it was funded. Mandel will be all over the state speaking about transparency and will be mentioning North Royalton, Cuyahoga Heights and Patton as leaders in transparency. It will get others talking and hopefully, acting, he added.

"Constituents are going to start reading about this in the newspaper and start asking, 'well if the North Royalton Schools have signed up, why haven't the Strongsville Schools, why haven't the Berea Schools? The Cuyahoga Heights Schools have signed up, why haven't the Independence Schools, why haven't the Brecksville-Broadview Heights Schools?"

Patton said this initiative is ahead of the game.

"Think about it, folks, 46th to first. I'm delighted to hear that this program has done so well, so quickly," he said.

Out of every Ohio dollar, Patton explained, 38 cents goes toward Medicaid, 31 cents to K-12 education, 12 cents to higher education and almost 9 cents funds prisons. These are the things Ohioans will be able to see when they look at the checkbook, which should be eye opening, he said.

He commended both schools for being on the leading edge of this movement.

"North Royalton School Treasurer Sidoti and his colleagues have worked hard to achieve a new level of transparency and accountability for the school district," Patton said, "and I'm confident that taxpayers will be pleased with the results."

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