



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Jeremy P. Kelley
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Dayton Public Schools has agreed to catalogue all of its spending online via the state treasurer's Ohio Checkbook program, making DPS one of the first large school districts in Ohio to participate, according to the treasurer's office.

OhioCheckbook.com launched in December, with details on every check that state government writes. Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel is trying to expand the initiative to local governments like cities, counties and school districts. Mandel's office said 490 of Ohio's 3,962 local agencies have expressed interest so far, and the local government piece of the website is in development.

"This is about putting the politicians on notice that we, the people, are watching them," Mandel said, "making them think twice before they stay at the Ritz-Carlton on the taxpayer's dime when they could have stayed at the Holiday Inn."

Mandel said Dayton Public Schools officials should be lauded for taking a leadership role. DPS was the fourth school district in the state to sign on, his office said.

School board President Robert Walker invited residents to hold the district accountable. DPS Treasurer Craig Jones and school board member Adil Baguirov said this move follows other fiscal transparency steps.

"This is a big win for the taxpayers and voters in this district," Baguirov said. "The beauty of this is that we're not joining this initiative because we're in any kind of trouble fiscally, or because voters are saying, 'hey, where's our money?'" Baguirov said. "We're joining because we want to improve our position, which is already very stable."

Mandel said OhioCheckbook.com is very user-friendly, with the ability to search for transactions by date, by highest or lowest dollar amount, by vendor name and by spending categories such as office supplies or legal bills. He has big goals for the website, calling it "a one-of-a-kind site that's setting a new national standard for government transparency."

The U.S. Public Interest Research Group in March ranked Ohio No. 1 among all states for transparency in government spending after the initial site launched.

"Taxpayers have a right to know how their tax money is being spent," Mandel said, adding that the service will be paid for by his office, with no cost to local agencies.

While DPS is the first Montgomery County government to officially sign on to the Ohio Checkbook program, other governments are opening their books in similar fashion. The city of Huber Heights has already launched an OpenGov website tracking all city spending. The city of Trotwood is about to do the same.

Ohio Treasurer's office spokesman Chris Berry said Mandel is supportive of all efforts to open government books for accountability, saying he hopes cities like Huber Heights can be incorporated into the state site eventually, so all information is in one place.

Springboro schools Treasurer Terrah Floyd said she has contacted Mandel's office about joining OhioCheckbook.com. Springboro schools already posts its financial statements and monthly check register on the district web site, and Floyd said she is just waiting on next steps from the state treasurer.

Jones said Dayton Public Schools is early in its involvement with Mandel's office, with details and technology issues still to be addressed. Jones said he hopes to have final 2014-15 spending posted on the site this fall.

Officials hope to have 2014-15 spending posted online by fall.

Opening checkbooks

Several of Ohio's largest counties, two large urban school districts and some local townships are among the governments signing

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up for OhioCheckbook.com so far:

Dayton Public Schools

Toledo Public Schools

Franklin County

Hamilton County

Stark County

Mahoning County

Sugarcreek Twp. (Greene County)

Harlan Twp. (Warren County)

Source: Ohio treasurer's office

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