

mediatrackers

OHIO

Unions Prepare New Campaign for School Funding Reform

By: [Jason Hart](#) | November 14, 2012

Share 0

“Strong Schools Strong Communities” is a new school funding reform group created by labor unions but nonetheless identified as “grassroots” by Ohio’s legacy media. Reporting on a November 12 Strong Schools Strong Communities press conference, *The Columbus Dispatch*, FOX 28, and ABC 6 all repeated without skepticism the self-description of the group backed by the Ohio Education Association (OEA) and Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT).

“A newly-formed group of teachers, administrators and school board members is ready to be the grassroots protector of public education in Ohio,” FOX 28 and ABC 6 reported.

“Warning signs of a brewing fire have emerged with the formation of a pair of grass-roots coalitions dedicated to improving education,” Dispatch reporter Catherine Candisky wrote.

“Grassroots” is an incredibly misleading descriptor for a group counting OEA among its founders. According to OEA’s annual report filed with the U.S. Department of Labor, the union raked in over \$53 million in forced dues in 2011.

OEA is the state’s most powerful progressive lobbying group, sinking millions this year into union redistricting campaign [Voters First Ohio](#) and millions last year into We Are Ohio, a labor shell group built to fight public employee union reform.

The *Dispatch*, FOX 28, and ABC 6 all quoted Dublin teacher Donna O’Connor, an OEA-trained, OEA-endorsed Ohio House candidate who lost her November 6 election bid despite support from D.C. union front [Moving Ohio Forward](#), as a representative of Strong Schools Strong Communities.

“We will advocate for a fair and sustainable and equitable funding formula and educate the public as to next years budget and policies that come out of our next session,” O’Connor said. O’Connor was paid \$81,014 in 2011, according to [Ohio Department of Education records](#).

The *Dispatch* also identified Dennis Willard as the spokesman for Strong Schools Strong Communities. Willard is the spokesman for We Are Ohio.

We Are Ohio – which took more than 95 percent of its funding from labor unions in 2011 – has benefited from the failure of Ohio reporters to call a spade a spade. For instance, *Dispatch* writer Jim Siegel called the labor campaign arm a “coalition of Democrats and union supporters” when the group joined Voters First in May 2012.

Legacy media outlets have not acknowledged the stark reality Media Trackers has been calling attention to for months.

“Yesterday, Strong Schools Strong Communities unveiled at a Columbus news conference its plan to promote the link between schools and the communities they serve, a common theme in local levy campaigns,” Candisky wrote in her recap of the November 12 presser.

This suggests Strong Schools Strong Communities may be taking the place of We Are Ohio, which filed no campaign finance report for the most recent reporting period. In 2011, We Are Ohio defended the power of union bosses like those at OEA and OFT by hyping the supposed danger union reform posed to public employees and the communities they serve.

Even the liberal “fact checkers” at PolitiFact Ohio were critical of [the 2011 union campaign’s frequently outrageous rhetoric](#).

To Candisky’s credit, she did list the groups behind Strong Schools Strong Communities, which include “the Ohio Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers, Parent Teacher Association, Ohio School Boards Association, Ohio Association of School Business Officials and Coalition for Equity & Adequacy of School Funding, which was formed in the early 90s to challenge the school-funding system.”