



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Chris Balusik
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CHILLICOTHE - Live in the Huntington school district or Jefferson Township and want to see where every penny of your tax dollars is going?

Now you can.

Jared Borg, with Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel's office, stopped by Huntington Middle School last week to join with school and Jefferson Township officials to unveil each entity's new web pages on OhioCheckbook.com. The school district and township are among the first in Ross County to elect to put their financial records online through the state initiative, and Wednesday's visit was designed to demonstrate how residents are now able to navigate those sites.

Reaching the local sites can be done by searching for them at OhioCheckbook.com. Once there, residents are able to review more than 29,000 individual transactions representing more than \$45 million in total Huntington schools spending over the last three years, while Jefferson Township's pages contain 1,543 transactions covering \$397,000 in spending over four years.

Transactions can be searched in a number of ways — by time frame, by vendor, by building, by type of transaction, and several other ways with results displayed in easy-to-understand graphic formats. Spending also can be compared from year to year, and an electronic version of individual checks can also be reviewed.

Huntington Superintendent Keith Stevenson and Treasurer Becki Peden said when the opportunity to put the district's books online at no charge came about, it was a no-brainer to get on board.

"One thing that Keith and I agree on is transparency," Peden said. "What we do is an open book, it's all public record anyway, so why not put it out there for anyone to see?"

Peden said in addition to the benefit to the public, the site helps with operations within her own office. Rather than have to launch a more cumbersome search within the office to find a specific piece of information she may need, she can now go to the website and use its search functions to find that information more quickly.

Jefferson Township Trustee Jamie Barker, who also heads the county's township association, said the transparency aspect is huge and that he has been encouraging his colleagues from other townships to look at joining the system.

"This is nice for us," Barker said. "We use the Uniform Accounting Network at the township level and that doesn't provide the visuals and the graphs, so I look forward to us using this ourselves, not just for the public."



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He also sees it as a time saver for treasurers and fiscal officers in terms of responding to public requests to see the budget or to look into a question about a particular purchase.

The OhioCheckbook.com initiative began with the state putting its financial records online in December 2014. It then began getting local government entities onto the system in September, with a total of 172 that can presently be found from among the 3,962 local entities across the state who received letters about the opportunity. Those include cities, counties, libraries, school districts, townships, villages and special districts. Another nearly 300 partnerships have also been agreed upon to get financial records on the web.

Borg said the treasurer's office is pleased with the initial number of entities on board and with the more than 430,000 searches that have been conducted on the site since its inception. Many local entities are still examining the possibility of joining the system, while some that are not using accounting software easily transferable to the system or that are still using physical ledgers to keep their books are going to be more slow in coming around.

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