



# JOSH MANDEL

## STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Carol Harper  
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Educational Service Center of Lorain County stepped up as a first ESC in Ohio to embrace financial transparency through OhioCheckbook.com.

"I believe the people of Lorain County have a right to know how their tax money is being spent," Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel said in a news release, "and I applaud local leaders here for partnering with my office to post the finances on OhioCheckbook.com. By posting local government spending online, we are empowering taxpayers across Ohio to hold public officials accountable."

Local leaders agreed.

"I think you link trust with transparency," said Jill Orseno, treasurer of Lorain County's ESC. "I've always promoted it here within. Now we're promoting it everywhere."

School districts need to go back to the voters for levies, said Seth Unger, senior policy advisor for public affairs in Mandel's office. "It eliminates the mystery. This is a great tool to say, 'Here is where we're spending the money.'"

The website was launched Dec. 2, 2014, revealing state spending. It displays more than 137 million transactions involving more than \$506 billion in spending over the last eight years. As of Feb. 9, it logged more than 458,000 searches, Unger said.

The data is stored on Amazon Cloud-based servers, which are some of the most secure servers in the world, he said.

Visitors find dynamic interactive charts to help them follow the money.

For example, mayors said they use the site to compare costs, such as salt prices, to save money during price negotiations, Unger said.

Superintendent Greg Ring said ESCLC elected officials chose to offer the financial data as a way to welcome voter scrutiny.

"I think we need to give credit to our governing board from the get go," Ring said. "With (Orseno's) leadership, our governing board certainly is supportive of this."

"They knew the need for transparency. This is a powerful tool to do this with. It's a really impressive tool."

Lorain County was the first county in the state to place finances online, Unger said. The other 510 governmental entities that signed up include Clearview and Columbia schools.



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Governing boards and elected officials end up being power users of the checkbook, he said.

So far, Orseno uploaded to the website more than 30,000 checks and four years of financial information totaling almost \$42.6 million.

Orseno said the process of uploading data is simple. The ESC will place the finances online once a year, after the books close. The majority of the ESC revenue is from services provided to school districts.

"I didn't realize we were the first ESC," Orseno said. "It makes me pleased and proud that we are."

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