

## **House Bill 9 Conference Committee**

### **House Bill 9 Testimony**

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Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Dr. Michael Hanlon, Superintendent of the Chardon Local Schools.

First, I would like to acknowledge the work of the House and the Senate on this important school choice legislation. It is imperative that we get this right for Ohio and, more specifically, for Ohio's children. While Chardon does not currently have any schools on the EdChoice eligibility list for 2020-21, the performance-based component of the system is clearly flawed when approximately 1,200 school buildings across the State of Ohio are deemed to be underperforming, and we remain concerned about the issues associated with any form of performance-based qualification.

Ohio's public schools do outstanding work every day and the schools on the EdChoice list are no exception. They meet the needs of all learners in their communities and provide classroom instruction and programming that is not only designed to meet Ohio's standards, but also to prepare students effectively to engage the Four E's: Enrollment, Enlistment, Employment and Entrepreneurship. Ohio's schools are simply not failing at the rate indicated under a flawed accountability model and legislation that misapplies the model for purposes of creating the illusion of the need for choice.

Resulting legislation from this Committee must address provide clarity regarding the long-term state funding of private school voucher programs. A school voucher set-aside in legislation may offer a short-term funding source for a fledgling school choice program, however, the concern remains that additional public dollars will be directed over the next several biennia away from state funds appropriated and made available to adequately fund a constitutionally-based public school system in our state. Consider the following:

1. Approximately 40 public school districts in Ohio already receive less State Foundation support per pupil than non-public schools in the state receive to educate their private school students. And now with the renewed legislative focus on the state voucher programs, we will see a pronounced shift in the level of state funding private schools will receive above and beyond what many public school districts receive.
2. Ohio's public school districts operate under a much higher level of accountability than their non-public counterparts. This accountability is in the form of financial audits regulating the use of state taxpayer dollars, as well as student performance on state achievement standards. Ohio's public schools are not fearful of choice or competition as has been suggested school choice advocates, but they do want their non-public counterparts to be measured by the same performance and accountability rules that apply to public school districts.

Much of the debate around EdChoice can be traced back to a flawed school funding model. One that is clearly broken having over 80% of the public school districts in Ohio on either a guarantee or funding cap - and essentially, 100 percent of the districts on a guarantee in FY 20 and FY 21 given the funding rollover of HB 166.

I have been serving for the last two years as co-chair of the Distribution Committee of the Cupp/Patterson School Funding Workgroup that is attempting to craft a funding model that is clear, understandable, reliable and predictable. Most importantly, this important work is centered on developing a funding approach that meets the needs of all of Ohio's students.

Ohio's public schools are highly-effective in meeting the needs of every learner, developing strong partnerships with community agencies to support social emotional gaps that impact students as they enter our schools, and developing innovative programs that promote a strong workforce for Ohio. It seems counterintuitive that the legislature would leave one job unfinished - funding a thorough and effective system of public education for all students in our state - in the interest of directing additional state financial support to non-public schools.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide input regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am happy to address your questions.

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