



Chair Jones, Vice-Chair Huffman, Sen. Fedor, Sen. Peterson, Rep. Edwards, and Rep. Robinson:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this hard-working Ohio House & Senate Education Conference Committee. My name is Jeanne Melvin, and I am a retired public school teacher and president of *Public Education Partners*, a statewide advocacy group for public school districts and the children and families that they serve.

The PEP Board believes that the extreme EdChoice expansion language, as well as other school-privatization perks secretly slipped into the budget bill this past summer, disregarded the trust bestowed on legislators by voters. It would be prudent for elected officials to bear in mind all of the problems that ensued from the other bills that were also veiled in secrecy, such as the school takeover policy. Extreme policy-making, crafted in secret, should not become standard operating procedure in the Buckeye State. Ohioans deserve better.

Despite the good intentions of our policy-makers to solve problems with evidence-based solutions, many of their decisions are influenced by ideology, political pressure, and intense lobbying by organizations with something to gain. PEP agrees with your esteemed colleague who knowingly revealed, "The performance-based system is made for the other party to fail. That's why they're created." This state representative called the performance-based system a "self-fulfilling prophecy," because the state grade card games high concentrated poverty districts to fail and be voucher eligible. He also admitted that private-school lobbyists have pushed to make the grading harder in order to capture more kids.

Although over 600 traditional public school districts in Ohio serve more than 1.8 million students, the Ohio General Assembly persists in following the advice of school-privatization lobbyists and organizations, philanthropies, and anti-public education "think-tanks" for direction in education issues. Whose interests are being served with the continued expansion of school vouchers that benefit a small number of families at the expense of the majority of Ohio families that choose our public school districts?

EdChoice Expansion will dramatically escalate the reliance on property taxes that compelled the Ohio Supreme Court to rule more than once that the way Ohio funds its schools is unconstitutional. If state leaders haven't yet figured out how to provide adequate and equitable funding to public school districts to guarantee comparable opportunities for ALL children, it makes no sense to continue increasing school voucher plans that remove much-needed funding and resources from the state's public school districts.

Before passing any more school-privatization policies, the Ohio Legislature needs to come to an agreement and implement a fair school funding plan. Legislators must also fix what most of them refer to as our deeply flawed state report card system. We cannot continue to make high-stakes decisions using such a terribly unreliable measure. Even though some changes have been made to the school report cards in the past, those were advocated by lobbyists for private schools. The PEP Board respectfully requests that members of this committee strongly encourage their colleagues to change course and start paying attention to the thoughtful input of professional educators and school leaders who spend their daily lives in our public school districts. Relying on their expertise would alleviate a lot of problems in education policy-making at the Statehouse.

Please support the House version of the EdChoice Voucher Expansion debate, and then focus on solving other important education issues in the great state of Ohio. Thank you.

Jeanne Melvin, *Public Education Partners*