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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 Brian Kuhn, Superintendent of the Clark-Shawnee Local School District in Clark County, Ohio.

I am extremely proud to serve as Superintendent for the Clark-Shawnee District. As a recent recipient of a School Quality Improvement Grant, we are investing in a strong literacy program to strengthen the reading skills of our youngest students. This investment provides professional development to teachers and the resources to be systematic with our reading instruction and assessments.

We experience success at our secondary level as well. 70.8% of Clark-Shawnee graduates in the Class of 2019 earned at least 3 semester hours of college credit through our robust College Credit Plus partnership with Clark State Community College. An overwhelming majority these credit hours are earned within the walls of our district classrooms.

The Ohio Department of Education's Strategic Plan, *Each Child, Our Future*, has established Social-Emotional Learning as one of four learning domains and meeting the needs of the whole child as a priority strategy. Our district joins three other Ohio public school districts in this strategic partnership with the Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA]. The DEA recognizes the need for mental health counseling as a preventative measure. This partnership allows us to offer trained mental health and substance abuse counselors from Paramount Behavioral Health Care Agency to our students at no cost to the district or the families.

You are probably thinking what, if anything, does this information have to do with EdChoice Vouchers. The answer is that Clark-Shawnee Local, along with other public schools in Ohio, are doing amazing things for every student every day.

Proponents of the EdChoice Voucher program and the looming expansion of qualifying schools argue this is nothing more than healthy competition. I have no problem with healthy competition if the playing field is even. But, the accountability of private and parochial schools is not the same as the accountability measures that public schools face on an annual basis. The EdChoice Voucher program provides choice, but there is no data to ensure that these choices are better.

Additionally, private and parochial schools can select what students they accept based on their standards. I find this concerning when public funds are being funneled to parochial schools who can be selective in their admissions practice. This is another example of where the playing field is not even. Public schools accept, and serve, all students.

The language in Ohio Revised Code that designates schools as EdChoice eligible based on academic performance is flawed language. The Ohio Department of Education recently identified and recognized 174 schools in the state as Momentum Award Recipients for their excellence in Value-Added test results—that is to say students were exceeding the anticipated academic growth. And make no mistake, this accomplishment

should be commended. That being said, 14.5% of the schools recognized as Momentum Award Recipients have also been identified as failing/underperforming schools under EdChoice language. The question begs to be asked...how is this possible? Additionally, one must ask why is this possible? As a state, how can we in one breath recognize schools for what is an amazing accomplishment and, in another breath, label the same schools as failing/underperforming? It does not make sense to me as a Superintendent.

On April 1, 2020, if our legislators cannot agree on a plan to revise the EdChoice Scholarship Program, 70% of public-school districts in the State of Ohio face having at least one voucher-eligible school. Senate Bill 89 outlines the House plan to phase out district-paid EdChoice vouchers and increase the income-based voucher eligibility from 200% to 250% of the federal poverty level and require the state to pay for the voucher if a student is both income-eligible and building eligible, beginning in the 2021-2022 school year.

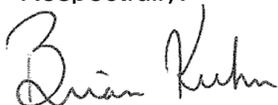
While these revisions do not address all of the concerns I share with many colleagues, it is the best solution I have seen proposed thus far. I recommend that eligibility for income-based vouchers remain at 200% of federal poverty guidelines. According to the 2018 census, this is 40% of the students in the state of Ohio. I would also recommend that consideration be given to establishing meaningful accountability systems for private schools that accept vouchers. If public dollars are flowing into their coffers, there should be a means of public accountability.

In closing, I wanted to share a few final thoughts on competition. As a public-school district in the State of Ohio, we are in competition every day. We compete against poverty, hunger, and mental health issues so we can win the battle in meeting the needs of the whole child. We compete for resources, both human and fiscal. The former involves finding, attracting, and retaining high-quality teachers to provide instruction to our students. The latter involves passing levies to remedy antiquated facilities and for operational expenses. Failure to adequately address this voucher program will require me to once again return to my voters and ask for more money. This will force me to look them in the eye and say, "The previous operational levy you approved did not last as long as we thought. Funds you approved for our public-school district were diverted to private schools under the EdChoice Voucher Program and now our resources are insufficient." I do not envision voters rallying to support us. I envision them becoming disenfranchised and their discontent manifesting itself in "no" votes.

You will hear others offer testimony stating that they pay taxes and their taxes should get to follow their child. Make no mistake about it, in my school district, the school taxes received from a single household would not cover the cost of the voucher.

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.

Respectfully:



Mr. Brian Kuhn
Superintendent
Clark-Shawnee Local Schools

Enclosure: Clark Shawnee Local Board of Education Resolution