

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. My name is Christina Sirbaugh and I am the Curriculum Director for St Clairsville-Richland City Schools. Our school district is in eastern Ohio and serves approximately 1800 students in grades Preschool through 12. I come to you today not only as an educator, but as a parent and a community member.

As an educator, I can speak to the effects EdChoice has had on our district. For the upcoming 2020-21 school year, over 1200 schools have been placed on a "failing" school list, ours included. Our elementary school, with a building grade of a "B" is considered a failing school based on data from the 2014, 2018, and 2019 report card. The improvements made during "Safe Harbor" years go unnoticed because of an unintended consequence, at least I am hopeful it is unintended. Our district has added resources and increased our performance only to be placed on a failing school list by one component - yes one component of the report card - Improving At Risk Readers, or K-3 Literacy. This component was designed as a tool to help identify struggling readers - a tool that is now graded. Each school across the state selects a diagnostic from a vendor approved list from the Ohio Department of Education. This diagnostic varies in levels of difficulty and is far from being a consistent method of measurement from district to district. Students are placed on a Reading Improvement Plan if they do not pass their diagnostic. Our district had four students that passed their reading diagnostic, and therefore were not placed on a reading improvement plan. These students became deductions in spite of meeting the cut score for reading. It's a reading plan that our students passed but the inclusion of writing caused the deduction. Let that sink in.

To say we are disappointed is an understatement. The students within our district who are taking the EdChoice scholarship are students who never even attended our school. They attended preschool at a private/parochial school and would never have attended our district in the first place. We have never received funding for these students, but the funds we receive for the students staying in our district have been taken to support voucher students in their private/parochial school endeavor. How do you take funds from one student to support another student in their private school choice?

In public schools, we educate ALL children. We aren't selective on who is admitted and who isn't. I have personally witnessed the hard work of the students and teachers within our district to make improvements, to overcome all obstacles by meeting the needs of every student, to build upon every students' background, to provide the resources, time and effort needed to be successful and to close gaps. I am so proud of the students and staff members for obtaining an A in gap closing, a B in progress (or value added), a C in Achievement and an overall B as our building grade - our district did this - only to be placed on a "failing" school list.

Not only our district, but hundreds of schools are placed on a failing school list with grades of A, B, or C. These schools aren't failing. This makes Ohio public schools look less than adequate.

This is the perception of the education system within our state, the perception that has been produced by legislators.

As a parent, my son attends our public school district. It was an easy choice for me, not because I work within the school district, but because of the opportunities available. Throughout his elementary career, I have seen him soar both within and outside of the classroom. The teachers have presented him with both challenging and rigorous material to further his content knowledge. The programs implemented throughout his school career have helped him become the person he is today through his academic and fine arts programs. This was the right decision. Due to the voucher system, each of these programs are at risk when the state budget has been frozen and funds to support these programs will need to be given to students who have never attended our district for their private education.

As a community member paying taxes, I do not believe my local tax dollars should be spent on another student's private education. Our district receives approximately \$2700 per student which leaves the remaining \$1900 to come from local tax money -- if we ever even received funding for the students who have taken the voucher. My local tax dollars should be spent on my local school district - not another student's private education.

I stand in support of the House version of SB 89. It is a step in the right direction to eliminate the financial burden public school districts face by losing funds at a time when funding was frozen on students they never counted in ADM. It will help to curb the elimination of programs within public schools, loss of resources needed to make growth, and cuts to staff. Taking the performance measure out of the voucher system makes sense when the report card is flawed, and we all know it is flawed. The Report Card system needs fixed - so why harm schools until it is done so? Why pull funds from public schools to help privatize education?

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.