

## EdChoice Testimony

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 Jim Fritz, superintendent of the Anthony Wayne Local Schools.

Imagine schools where students learn all year long, take the State assessment, and score extremely well. Each year on average 75% of all the State assessments taken in these school buildings are scored in the top two categories- accelerated and advanced-75%. These students score so well that it places the building in the top 4% of all school buildings in the entire State; yes, I said the top 4% of all school buildings in the State. These schools have received State and Federal designations because of their performance and the education provided to their students. These school buildings not only do extremely well academically but work to develop the personal success characteristics of each student. In addition, these school buildings take great pride in their Purple Star designations and the thousands of dollars raised to support community service projects. We, as legislators and educators entrusted with providing outstanding educational opportunities to students, would never suggest these schools are failing. I have just described to you Waterville and Whitehouse Primary buildings that are in the Anthony Wayne Local School District and, unfortunately, that are currently on the EdChoice list for the 2020-21 school year.

The question that school district officials, educators, and now parents, business officials and community members are asking is how is this possible. How can we allow this as leaders in this great State? How can we allow the expansion of the EdChoice scholarship program to over  $\frac{2}{3}$  of public school districts in Ohio and allow the syphoning of State funds away from public schools?

So, the Anthony Wayne Local Schools have two buildings on the 2020-21 list. How will this impact the District financially? While I can't give you an exact amount of financial impact at this time, I can share with you this estimate. Approximately,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of Kindergarten students in our community choose to attend private schools that have all day Kindergarten programs. If these students at Waterville and Whitehouse Primary decided to go to an EdChoice provider school and take the \$4560 scholarship, we will see approximately \$400,000 reduced from our State foundation payment. We suspect this amount would be significantly larger each year if Waterville, Whitehouse, and other school buildings in our District continued to be falsely labeled as failing schools. In a District where we take great pride in having the lowest school taxes in the county, if we continue to see large deductions in funding from programs like EdChoice and continue to receive flat State funding, the District will have no choice but to ask local tax payers to approve a new levy.

In the last two months, many of us have already identified issues with the EdChoice Scholarship law and have suggested both short-term and long-term solutions. I know

each chamber has developed amendments to address this issue. I'm asking that the House and Senate come together now, based on these amendments, in conference committee and work on short-term and long-term solutions that meets the following criteria:

- EdChoice should not rely on a faulty report card system
- EdChoice should not take away funding from public schools

I am also requesting that legislators work on a long-term solution that addresses the following items:

- Funding of schools (public, private, and charter) and special programs (i.e., EdChoice, College Credit Plus, and John Peterson Scholarship)
- Requires all schools that accept funding from the State to follow the same legal and legislative requirements

The work on these solutions needs to happen now. We can't afford as a State to continue to delay these collaborative discussions. So I will end my testimony with a quote from Henry Ford- "Coming together is a beginning; Keeping together is progress; Working together is success."

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