



Mabe Rodriguez
EdChoice Testimony

My name is Mabe Rodriguez, Executive Director of CISE (Catholic Inner-city Schools). CISE is a nonprofit organization founded 40 years ago by three Cincinnati community leaders of different faiths (Ed Harness from Procter & Gamble, Archbishop Bernadin and Ralph Lazarus, from Lazarus stores, later Macy's). These men united with the mutual goal of utilizing parish schools to provide Catholic school opportunities for challenged families, regardless of their religious affiliation, leveraging the generosity of the broader community.

CISE currently serves 2,100 scholars in nine designated inner-city schools. We have been able to grow the number of children served over the years thanks to the generosity of the community, but most importantly, thanks to the support of the EdChoice vouchers. Today 88% of our scholars receive a voucher.

Some statistics:

- CISE serves 2,100 scholars - Pre-k to 8th grade and 320 high school students; **Total of 2,400.**
- **96% of CISE school students live in poverty.**
- **74% of CISE school students are non-Catholic.**
- **85% are minorities.**
- **95% of CISE third graders passed the Third Grade Reading Guarantee** - outperforming the statewide average. This is an important literacy milestone as research shows that learning to read early and well in the primary grades positively impacts students in later years.
- **86% of 8th grade graduates are accepted into Catholic high school.** Many CISE students are also among the first in their families to attend college.
- **94% of CISE students who graduate from Catholic high school are accepted into college.** In addition to excellent academics, the formation of critical values such as responsibility, perseverance, respect, discipline and cooperation that extend far beyond the years of formal education are provided in CISE schools.

The families we currently serve have a choice of where to place their children in school. We know from research that they chose a CISE school for 3 key reasons:

1. Safety and inclusiveness
2. Gospel values
3. Academics

We hear this over and over again: the combination of safety, inclusiveness, gospel values and academics are key components in their choice. Parents/caregivers tell us their schools are safe havens for their children. We know many of our scholars live with trauma and face many difficult situations far beyond what some of us can imagine.

Why are vouchers important:

- 65-70% of the CISE inner-city schools' budget comes from EdChoice vouchers.
- The rest of funding need comes mostly from CISE and other support.
- Our CISE schools could not survive without the vouchers.

Although 96% of our scholars are poor, the majority use the Traditional EdChoice (88%). Why don't they use the Ed choice expansion based on poverty? Their lives are bombarded with complexity. Providing proof of residency is easier than proof of income for them. A Duke energy bill is enough.

Changing poverty level eligibility will also hinder the poorest families. Why? Higher income families have access to more resources and skills (including computer/internet, savviness) and support. Thus, if they are included in the eligibility, they will likely access vouchers first, leaving behind the underserved.

We ask that you continue with the current approach of designated schools and poverty levels. Changing this will have a detrimental, profound and long-term effect on many lives, and on those who are most in need, further increasing disparity among our citizens and severe effect to our city. Education is the most important and sure vaccine against poverty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mabe Rodriguez", is written over a printed name and title. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Mabe Rodriguez
CISE Executive Director