

HB 9 Testimony – February 14, 2020 – T.C. Chappellear

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 Dr. T.C. Chappellear, Superintendent of Indian Creek School District in Jefferson County. We serve the communities of Steubenville, Wintersville and Mingo Junction.

I am here today to encourage the committee to adopt the meaningful voucher reforms as passed by the Ohio House.

The House plan represents a fundamental shift in our voucher system, from a failing schools approach to an income-based approach.

The failing schools model has failed Ohio. If we double down on it, Ohio will erratically lurch from year to year with an ever-evolving and ever-growing list of schools that have been deemed failures.

Defining the question of "what is a failing school" presents inherent challenges that will not be overcome by legislation. As an example of the inconsistency of utilizing a failing school model, allow me to use Indian Creek High School, which is a 9-12 building which will be on the list for the 20-21 school year. Indian Creek High School qualified as a failing school due to receiving a grade of F in value-added over the last 3 years. However, as Paul Harvey use to say, "Now, for the rest of the story...".

Looking at Indian Creek's Value Added Report from the most recent report card, you will see that over the past 3 years, ICHS has been improving tremendously as evidenced by the move from "Red" to "Green". In fact, the current year Value Added grade on the 2019 State Report Card is an A. Over the past 3 years in fact, the Index Number for the Lowest 20% of students has risen from a .15 to a 7.74. Students with Disabilities subgroup moved from a -7.87 to a 3.19. Overall Index number moved from a -8.10 to a 3.08. This is tremendous progress and hardly indicative of a "Failing School"!

These results have not occurred by luck – they have occurred because of hard work and effective leadership by the teachers and administration in that building. Under the current law regarding the EdChoice Building Designated Scholarship Program, these results will be impossible to continue or even to maintain.

You see, our school district has 82 students who currently attend Central Catholic High School in Steubenville. These students have always attended the parochial school system. However, current law would dictate that students currently attending grades 8-11 in the parochial system would be eligible for a tuition voucher up to \$6000 (even though we receive \$2,679 in state funding for each of our public school students) costing our district a potential \$500,000. There are also families who choose to send their students to the Jefferson County Christian School. We estimate we will lose over \$540,000 without losing a student!

The income-based approach is much healthier because it focuses on what really matters, which is opportunity for young people. It's important to remember, that's why we are here.

The House plan also represents a fundamental shift in how these vouchers would be funded as well.

As you know, Ohio today uses the deduct method to fund performance-based EdChoice vouchers, which is fundamentally flawed. By inappropriately deducting aid from local districts, it diverts locally-voted tax dollars to pay for vouchers.

As I testified earlier, Indian Creek School District receives \$2,679 of state aid per student. The estimated cost of \$540,000 for the new voucher program for high school students alone equates to a state funding loss for 202 of our high school students. That means we will receive no state aid for 37% of our high school population. How can you let that happen?

A better approach is the one contained in the House plan, which is for the state to fund these vouchers. In my view, if the state is going to issue vouchers, the state should pay for them, not use some sort of shell game to prop them up with locally-voted property taxes.

By the way, imagine being a superintendent or a school board member or a teacher and trying to explain this shell game to people in your community – especially when you're trying to pass a levy.

My final point really gets to the very heart of why we're here today, and that's Ohio's school accountability system. Let me be clear: No one here today...no one in our classrooms...is opposed to accountability. I embrace it because I believe in the work we're doing. What we and educators have a problem with is our broken system.

Our students and teachers are spending too much time on state- and federally-mandated testing. These are not diagnostic tests designed to help inform and improve the education we are providing to students. These are high-pressure, high-stakes tests that have taken on a life of their own.

I believe we can do better if all of us – legislators, educators and parents – truly collaborate and develop a school accountability system that works for Ohio schools and, most importantly, Ohio students.

T.C. Chappellear, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Indian Creek Local School District  
587 Bantam Ridge Rd.  
Wintersville, OH 43953