

When we become parents, we want to do whatever it takes to provide the very best for our children. We want them to have every opportunity to achieve, to realize their dreams, to be healthy and happy. As parents, we make many important decisions as our children grow, decisions that will have long, lasting impacts on them as they mature. Choosing what school(s) our children will attend is one of the most important decisions we will make as parents. In Ohio, parents have many options when it comes to schooling. Some are clearly better than others. There are private schools, parochial schools and all sorts of charter schools but I believe the best option for families is the local public school system in any community. In my district, we strive to BE the choice.

Historically, the private school options in Ohio have included costs for families. If you chose a private school, a religious school or some other non-public option, you typically paid tuition to enroll. Private and parochial schools have historically been selective, admitting only those students that fit their defined profile. Public schools, supported by property taxes, however, take ALL resident students without tuition, a free public education. Private schools are not held to the same mandates and requirements that we, in the public schools must meet. They are not held to the same rules of transparency and accountability that our public schools abide by. Yet, in recent years, in an attempt to expand choice, special programs have been designed that divert local property tax dollars from the public schools to fund charter and non-public, religious and private schools. If public dollars are to be used to support private schools at all, shouldn't the private schools be held to same rules and mandates that are required of our public institutions? Shouldn't any recipient of public dollars be accountable for uniform accounting and audit procedures?

Looking for a way to determine eligibility for vouchers and scholarships, one plan uses the state's flawed report card system to justify the siphoning of funds from local school districts. If the state determines a school to be "failing" (as determined by the local report card that many legislators themselves have admitted to be flawed), students residing in that school's attendance area become eligible to obtain a voucher to attend elsewhere. As we know, for high schools, the state will "deduct" \$6000 from the eligible district's funding to pay for a voucher. For elementary schools, they take \$4650. These funds, taken from local district budgets is NOT reimbursed. It is taken.

This year, the Woodridge Local School District, the district I lead, has NO schools that are voucher eligible. We do, however, recognize that if the state's flawed accountability system is to be used to determine eligibility, we could, in future years, have eligible schools. Some of Ohio's finest school districts have schools on the list this year, which only highlights that the state's accountability system is broken.

Like some other districts in our state, we, in Woodridge, receive so little in state funding that a voucher program could result in a dramatic loss of LOCAL funds. This year, we receive roughly \$957 per pupil from the state of Ohio. If we were voucher eligible and lost just one high school aged student through the voucher program, the state would take \$6000 from our budget for that child and send it to the private school. Since we only get \$957 per pupil from Columbus, the state would have to dip into our LOCAL TAX REVENUES to the tune of \$5043 to get the full amount "due" the private school. When voters go to the polls to consider local property tax levies for the school district, I do not believe that any of them do so thinking that ANY of the funds being approved will be taken from the district to support individual students attending private or parochial schools. That state is taking money that voters earmarked for a specific purpose and using it for something far different.

The more recent alternative, a proposal that would provide EdChoice Vouchers to students based on an income eligibility formula sounds better on the surface. In such a system, students whose family income falls within a defined percentage of the poverty index would be eligible for a voucher. The funds to pay for the vouchers, we are told, would be taken from a state fund, not deducted from the budgets of resident school districts. If it were constitutional, such a plan sounds good, however, there is only so much state funding to go around. What state programs will be cut in order to fund vouchers for private, religious schools?

The Ohio Constitution is clear. Article VI Section 2 states: "The General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state; but no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state."

As we wait to see how you in the General Assembly resolve these issues, we urge you to rethink these plans. We suggest that the residents of our great state would be better served if the legislature were to abandon these unconstitutional arguments and instead tackle the larger issues of school funding. There are proposals before the General Assembly now that would be a great start. The Cupp-Patterson Funding proposals deserve consideration and action. We urge the legislature to abandon voucher programs all together. Public funds should not be used to fund religious schools regardless of the mechanism. Districts like mine get less state funding per pupil than the chartered non-public schools already. The DeRolph decision(s) were clear and unambiguous. The way our schools are funded is unconstitutional. That's not my opinion. That was the Supreme Court's ruling – on multiple occasions. Now is the time for the legislature to stand up for public schools, doing what our constitution demands, “securing a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state.”

Thank you.