

Last fall, I learned my children, who came from public schools, would be eligible for ED choice. With a current 10th and 11th graders, and a student entering as a freshman, you can understand my relief from the financial burden we were going to face. No, we aren't the family who will qualify for any income based voucher, even if the limits are raised. But can you imagine the expense of private tuition for 3 children at a private catholic high school for a middle class family?

Here's why we left the public school last year, after 10 years in the public education system. For years, our school district conveyed they were financially in the red, and the 5 year forecast did not look optimistic. The solution was "pass the levy" or we'd face increased class sizes, teacher lay-offs, school closings, and state minimum standards. While those changes would not happen overnight, they could happen the junior and senior year for my older two. So rather than leave our community, we chose to leave our school district. When threats like this are made (and state minimum standards were implemented in the past in my district), they do not impact ONLY a D or F rated school- they are across the board to all schools in the district, so I implore you to consider families like mine who make changes for other reasons than a report card grade.

I recognize this program has flaws. What I hope you understand is you made a commitment to families like mine this year, and should support it now that you've advertised a list of schools and we are all banking on the help. Perhaps it's that it will only be here for the next year, but provide those awards as promised, and stipulate the overhaul of the program for next year, when you can really come up with a fair plan, not just rush to decide and make a decision that will so negatively affect so many families.

What would be a fair plan? Consider decreasing the value of the ED choice scholarships, to be more inclusive- truly providing an ED Choice. For instance, instead of a blanket \$6000 to each student, perhaps \$3000 per student. Or, change the funding of the program- the public school system is receiving money from the state for students they are not teaching- that could be the money we, as parents, have access to use for our CHOICE of education, independent of why we want to leave the public school setting. The public schools should not have to come up with an additional money from their budget to cover that gap in what they get for each student to get to that \$6000 total for the voucher, but they also should not get to keep that money for a student they are not teaching. They are already getting money from every home in the district via property taxes, and I support that strong schools help us all within the community. The idea of an income based only ED choice program will eliminate families like mine and could take away choice, as affording 3 students in the private school may not be financially feasible. We never planned on sending our kids to private school, until the district financial situation left us with no choice. We're not going back now, and I want to have all my kids at the same school, not travel all over to different locations. While I understand the original intent was to help students in failing schools, there is still an expansion program for income based need. Why not work on a plan to offer some assistance (again- the money the state gives to public schools) without an income stipulation, and still have a program for those with greater financial need.

At the end of the day, a rash decision benefits no one. Create a committee with educators, parents, and representatives from private institutions, and pick some parents with a lot of kids- they know how to stretch a budget. I'll bet if you take the age old republican vs democrat stance out of it and focus on families and children, you'll find common ground.

Sincerely,
Kim Tomblin