

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Robinson, HB 9 Conference Committee, thank you for providing this hearing and considering our comments. My name is Heather Weingart and I am the President of the Board of Education for Shaker Heights City Schools. I am also a Shaker Heights parent with a sophomore and seventh grader. I am deeply committed to the success of our students and schools.

Today I ask you to mandate EdChoice Vouchers be paid by the state. I also ask you to re-think how we measure our public schools. I am asking you to adopt the House Amended version of Senate Bill 89.

When an initiative creates a ripple effect like that of EdChoice expansion our elected officials owe it to our constituents to carefully examine and reconsider the decisions that got us here. Before the current proposed expansion there were approximately 230 Ohio schools who were EdChoice eligible. Following the expansion there will be approximately 1200 eligible schools, a 422% increase. Over ½ of the newly eligible schools received an A, B or C on their last State Report Card. I can't imagine the intention of the expansion was to create a state that has failing schools in 70% of it's school districts. In Shaker Heights the expansion will result in two schools being added to the eligibility list. Both of those schools received "B" on the most recent state report card. One of the schools identified, Onaway, was just named one of northeast Ohio's highest performing elementary schools in a Cleveland State University Study.

Further, taking community tax dollars to fund tuition at a private school exacerbates the very problem we are trying to solve. It's a tactic that steals money from our public schools that they so desperately need. How does it make sense to deem that a school is failing and then take the most basic resource needed to improve? And, in many cases, those dollars are going to students who never even intended to use our local schools. In addition, private and parochial schools are not subject to the same state evaluation to measure student achievement, enrollment and admissions; therefore a community has no way to evaluate how effectively they are using public funds to educate students. Shaker Heights and the surrounding areas boast over 60 private and parochial schools. Nineteen of those schools currently accept EdChoice vouchers and that list will grow under EdChoice expansion due to the huge amount of students that will be wrongly and suddenly eligible. Private and parochial schools are already practicing a not so underground recruiting strategy that is creating tension in a formerly collaborative partnership between public and private schools. Allowing community tax dollars to subsidize these schools will foster further tension and make it difficult for public schools to work with these schools.

Ultimately, if the goal is to ensure the success of every student we must consider both the intentional and unintentional consequences of the EdChoice expansion. I urge you to reconsider the way we measure our schools success and to make EdChoice vouchers state funded.