

## **Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers**

**HB 9 Conference Committee**

**Thursday, February 13, 2020**

**Joseph Sorenson, High School Social Studies Teacher in Reynoldsburg City School District**

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Joseph Sorenson and I come to you a proud former Reynoldsburg City Schools student, a Reynoldsburg City Schools teacher and the proud parent of two current Reynoldsburg City Schools students. I became a teacher six years ago as a second career after a long period of personal struggle and poverty.

My students are eager to learn more about the world around them and I frequently have community leaders in my classroom. I know it is my job to make sure they are prepared for whatever future they want, so I reach out to and listen to business leaders daily. It is my job as a parent, and more importantly as a teacher, to know what the businesses need from our students when we send into the world. I hear every day they need real world problem solvers; they need employees that can be innovative and driven, creative, colorful and confident. They also need employees to have real world experience and connections.

As a teacher, I always work to bridge that gap and create paths for my students to be successful long after they are in my class. One way I do this is through organized field trips. My father works in an industry where he meets CEOs of many influential companies around the state, which is how I get to have some of these great conversations. Many of those leaders tell him that it would be a great thing to have some students come in and see how their business runs and have conversations on site, in real time. Opportunities like this would be an incredible learning experience, not only for my own children, but all my students. We all understand the opportunities we are given are often based on the people we know. I have the chance to introduce my students to CEOs and government officials. However, my school district has had to make some tough decisions regarding transportation, and unless teachers find grant money or fundraise, these field trips cannot happen. With everything that teachers are required to do in a day, we struggle to find enough time to fundraise or write grants.

What I do see happen is every year I get a few students on my roster that come back to our district after starting their year at a private school. Now, my district pays to educate these students for the rest of the year. Many schools that accept vouchers do not have to educate every student. When students struggle or underperform, they often send them back to us and keep the money. Often those students are further behind, and our district spends additional resources to get this student back on track for success in the real world. We have the privilege of educating the student but bear the weight of doing more with less resources. We do this because we have the responsibility and mandate under the Ohio Constitution to educate all students. The funds that go to private schools through the performance based EdChoice program are my taxpayer dollars. How do lawmakers plan to hold private schools accountable for my taxpayer dollars? How is it the public-school district's responsibility to pay deductions for students to go to private

schools, then to also have to teach the student? How is this good fiscally conservative policy? If you believe in school choice, that is fine, but no business would survive if it had to fund its competition, but yet, that is what the legislature is asking schools to do here at the expense of my kids. I work hard every single day to educate students and my performance and the performance of my colleagues is public. This accountability shows our communities how their tax dollars are being spent. When those same funds go to private schools, no one knows how the money is being spent! As a taxpayer, I demand better.

Now, imagine a world where we invest that money our public-school system and support the 90% of Ohio students who go to public schools. Teachers have the ideas to make our schools the greatest in the world, they are the ones on the ground, they understand the issues facing our children, and they are begging for your support. Instead, the system as it stands rips money out of communities that need it. If we want to have our students ready to handle the business of tomorrow, and we want an education system that is ready for the business world of tomorrow then let's use good business sense for our students today. We need the proper support for our public schools. Students across the state are hurting because of the current voucher system. I support the policies proposed in Senate Bill 89. If state funding for vouchers was the default, districts across the state would be able to do what they do best- invest in our children.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your consideration. I am available to respond to any questions you may have.