

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 Joseph Spiccia, superintendent of the Wickliffe City School District and my colleague is Julie Ramos, the director of strategic innovation for the district.

The expansion of vouchers comes with consequences, intended and unintended, and because of those consequences it is important that this legislation be reconsidered and its implementation properly and thoroughly evaluated.

There are several areas of concern to be considered:

- Public funds should not be used for private schools, in particular religious schools. One example of why this is a concern is found in the Wickliffe City School District. The Wickliffe Schools have a unique situation when it comes to this issue. Wickliffe is the home of an Orthodox Rabbinical College. The families of the students reside on campus and all attend private Orthodox Hebrew Schools. As a religious community they are tax exempt. Currently, there are approximately 70 students attending Hebrew schools who reside in the district. The number of students who would be eligible for an Ed-Choice voucher number about 50.
  - The families of these students live in tax-exempt housing.
  - The students in these families have never attended the public schools.
  - The potential cost to the WCSD is:
    - \$150,000.00 for high school students
    - \$106,000.00 for elementary school students
- The evaluation system (State Report Card) used to determine EdChoice is flawed and is currently being evaluated for reform. It is inconceivable that a decision of this magnitude be made based on flawed data, inexact calculations, and inconsistent findings.
  - The criteria set to become designated as an EdChoice school is flawed. For example it only takes a grade of D or F in one Report Card component two out of three years for a building to become EdChoice eligible. Given there are six grades (and 11 sub-grades) that go into an overall grade, it seems punitive that one low grade would result in such a potentially damaging consequence. One would question, why have an overall grade if one of the contributing grades could push a school into EdChoice.
  - The criterion does not consider trend data. A fair and reasonable approach should look at 3 to 5 years of trend data in a variety of areas. If a school/district were truly at risk, that information would become more valid than simply selecting one criterion from just two of three years to determine EdChoice eligibility.
- The proposed funding that follows an EdChoice student serves to punish a school district. For example, the Wickliffe City School District receives less than \$1,900.00 from the state foundation per student, yet, \$6,000.00 would be given to each high school student who chooses to attend a private high school and take the EdChoice funding.
  - The WCSD is a capped district with regard to State Foundation Funding. In 2019 we received \$2.4 million from the State but the calculated revenue

was \$3.5 million. In 2020, we received \$2.5 million from the State but the calculated revenue was \$3.5 million.

- Further, the WCSD received as much as \$2.7 million in annual revenue just 10 years ago in Tangible Personal Property Tax Reimbursements. Because of legislation, that amount has been phasing out for years and disappears completely in 2022.
- In spite of that, the citizens of Wickliffe have passed 26.7 mills of new money since 2011—15.8 mills of operating funds and a 10.9 mill bond issue—because they support and believe in the district and its work. This kind of support is remarkable from a community in which the median household income is below the state average and the average age of the community is nine years higher than the state average. They do not want their money used for Ed Choice Vouchers. They want their money to be used to support and improve their public school system, and therefore, support and improve their community.
- We are proponents of fair and equitable measures of accountability. We are also proponents of transparency. This legislation was not transparent, does not meet any measure of validity as measured in research, and needs to be reconsidered.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 conference committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide input regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. We are happy to address your questions.