

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 Marlon Styles, proud Superintendent of the Middletown City School District. Standing with me today is Randy Bertram, our proud Treasurer. We stand here before you today proud to say we love PUBLIC education. We adamantly oppose the EdChoice Voucher program. Let's have some real talk today about this. Julie Gibson, proud public school parent in the Middletown City School District, said during the Southwest Ohio EdChoice press conference "Let's take a different spin on this, if Starbucks had bad reviews for their coffee, they would not be handing gift cards to every person walking in and sending them over to Dunkin Donuts. They would invest the money back into their product." You know it is time to invest in our public school system. We ask you to stop handing out gift cards to those who choose and can afford Private school tuition.

The inequitable EdChoice Voucher program has already taken a devastating impact on the Middletown City School district in the amount of \$1,693,050 over the past two fiscal years. Private school students who have never attended our public school district account for \$1,511,700 of the EdChoice expenditures during that time. You truly are taking funds meant for our public school students and re-allocating them to private school families.

The House and the Senate sponsored a joint Report Card Study Committee after agreeing the report card accountability system is broken and flawed. If this is the case, then the State of Ohio needs to hold themselves accountable for fixing it. Enough is enough. Challenge the Report Card Study Committee to deliver a solution. If the report card accountability system is broken and flawed, then the House and the Senate should step up and cease any legislative connection between report card results and these inequitable EdChoice Vouchers.

Let's take a moment and focus on Equity. It is apparent to me that those who support the EdChoice Voucher Program believe in widening the equity and opportunity gap in Ohio. Those who can afford Private school tuition are taking advantage of the inequitable EdChoice voucher program. The families who are below 200% poverty and who truly want their child to attend Private school still will not be able to afford the tuition—even with the EdChoice voucher. In fact, Private schools can select the EdChoice voucher applications they choose to admit. Yes, let me very clear, they do not have to admit an EdChoice voucher brown, black, disabled, poor, or non-English speaking student. If an EdChoice student does not meet the private school admission standards then the Private schools are sending these families back to their public school. This year, about 30 of our Middletown students were denied admittance to the private school of their choice despite their EdChoice voucher and their wish to choose a different schooling option. The EdChoice voucher program is inequitable and the creators and supporters of EdChoice must work to correct their errors. Ohio provides our district \$4,312 per student. However, under EdChoice, Ohio says my district must provide a \$6,000 EdChoice Voucher to high school students to pay for Private school tuition. Not only are you underfunding the education of our public school students, but you are also taking additional funds from them to pay for private school tuition. This is inequitable. This is unjust. EdChoice serves to further

divide our communities by widening the equity gap and opportunity gap in Ohio. We are holding our legislators accountable for this.

A few critical advocacy areas. A) We support a plan that moves Ohio closer to real reform of our school testing and the report card system. B) We support any plan that ends the failed schools model (based on a broken and flawed report card system) for vouchers and moves to an income-based approach that prioritizes low-income kids, with the most needy kids getting top priority. C) We support a plan that is a direct funding model from the State that does not reduce the amount of dollars allocated to public schools. D) We support a plan that requires all Private schools who accept EdChoice Vouchers or scholarships to be held to the same accountability standards as Ohio public schools and cannot discriminate against any student public school applicants.

Today, we are here speaking for the families and parents of public school students who cannot afford to drive two hours to Columbus to testify. We are speaking for the families and parents of public school students who do not feel comfortable driving to Columbus to testify because they do not speak English. We are here speaking for the families and parents of public school students who could not be here today because they are employed and cannot afford to take off work to drive to Columbus to testify. These are the people that we encourage you to listen to because they oppose the EdChoice voucher program and so do we. This is a matter of equity. This Conference Committee is responsible for deciding whether to close the equity and opportunity gap or to support the EdChoice Voucher program and widen the equity an opportunity gap present in the State of Ohio.

Julie Gibson, proud public school parent in the Middletown City School District, said during the SW Ohio EdChoice press conference this past Friday “my public school district has done right by my children.” Today, I leave you with one last question. Will the members of this Conference Committee do what is right by the public school students in Ohio or will you leave them behind?

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.

Julie Gibson - Middletown City School District paren (click link to watch):

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