



Office of the Treasurer  
90 N. East Street  
Pickerington, OH 43147  
614.833.2110  
www.pickerington.k12.oh.us

February 17, 2020

Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, and Ranking Member Robinson:

My name is Ryan Jenkins, and I am the Treasurer/CFO for the Pickerington Local School District in Fairfield County.

I am here today to address Am. Sub. HB 9, specifically to note my concerns about Ohio’s ballooning EdChoice voucher program. In its current format, Ohio’s EdChoice voucher program dramatically impacts the system of public education in Ohio. The program, which must abide by provisions of ORC 3302.036, creates an unusual scenario in which decisions about the 2020-2021 school year can be affected by the 2013-2014 grade card. Unfortunately, these and other provisions may be unfairly labeling many public schools as “failing” and forcing districts to subsidize the cost of private school tuition. Compounding this phenomenon, due to recent changes in HB 166, hundreds of millions of public tax dollars will subsidize private school tuition for students, many of whom may never have even attended a public school. This was enacted as ORC 3310.03(A)(6)(a), which expanded the EdChoice Scholarships to students in grades 8-11 even if they *had not* attended a public school prior to entering high school.

Next school year, more than 70% of Ohio’s districts will have an EdChoice-eligible building. Estimates show that the number of eligible buildings will mushroom from approximately 230 last year to more than 1,200 next year — a 422% increase. Nearly half of these buildings received overall grades of A, B or C on their current state report card.

Vouchers cost \$4,650 for K-8 students and \$6,000 for high school students, funneling money away from public schools to pay for private and parochial tuition. Students can keep the voucher throughout their academic career, costing taxpayers nearly \$66,000 per pupil to fund a private education. These costs far exceed what the state provides school districts, so districts must rely on local tax dollars to cover the difference.

In the Pickerington School District for the 2020-2021 school year, there will be seven (7) schools that are EdChoice eligible. Of the seven (7) schools, all of them except 2 have overall building grades of C or better on the 2018-2019 report card, and three (3) of them have a building grade of B. Additionally, **Pickerington Local Schools has an overall District grade of B**—this can hardly be described as a failing school district with failing schools.

The charts showing the general performance of our EdChoice schools, and all other schools, are as follows:

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| <b>Pickerington Local Schools EdChoice Buildings with 18-19 Building Grade</b> |                                 |                   |                       |                             |                             |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>District</b>  | <b>Building</b>                 | <b>Grade Span</b> | <b>13-14 PI Index</b> | <b>17-18 Building Grade</b> | <b>18-19 Building Grade</b> |
| Pickerington   | Fairfield Elementary School     | K-4               | B                     | B                           | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Pickerington Elementary School  | K-4               | B                     | B                           | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Tussing Elementary School       | K-4               | B                     | C                           | C                           |
| Pickerington   | Violet Elementary School        | K-4               | A                     | B                           | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Harmon MS                       | 5-6               | B                     | C                           | D                           |
| Pickerington   | Pickerington Ridgeview Junior   | 7-8               | B                     | C                           | C                           |
| Pickerington   | Pickerington Alternative School | 9-12              | N/A                   | F**                         | F**                         |

\*\*Pickerington Alternative School is a Credit Recovery Alternative School that the District uses to help credit- deficient students graduate. In 2013-2014, this was a conversion community school operated by PLSD, operating as a dropout recovery school.

| <b>Non-EdChoice Buildings in PLSD, with 18-19 Building Grade</b> |                                  |                   |                             |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>District</b>  | <b>Building</b>                  | <b>Grade Span</b> | <b>18-19 Building Grade</b> |
| Pickerington   | Toll Gate Elementary             | K-4               | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Sycamore Creek                   | K-4               | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Heritage Elementary              | K-4               | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Toll Gate Middle                 | 5-6               | A                           |
| Pickerington   | Diley Middle                     | 5-6               | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Lakeview Junior High             | 7-8               | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Pickerington North High School   | 9-12              | B                           |
| Pickerington   | Pickerington Central High School | 9-12              | B                           |



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Of the seven (7) schools that are EdChoice eligible, four (4) are elementary schools. Due to current Ohio law regarding EdChoice vouchers, entering kindergarten students have the opportunity to get an EdChoice Scholarship for their use *even though they have never attended a public school*. These same elementary schools all have a Performance Index rating of B or higher for the 2013-2014 school year (the overall building grade was not given in 2013-2014), and overall grades of Bs and Cs for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. What's more, most of the school buildings in Pickerington Schools that these students will attend *as they progress through grades 1-12 all have overall building grades of B or higher*.

During the 2019-2020 school year, seven (7) entering kindergartners obtained the EdChoice Scholarship. These students had obviously never attended a public school. If all seven (7) were to stay in the Pickerington Local School District from the 2019-2020 thru the 2031-2032 school years, this could result in \$65,850 in local funding (\$4,650/yr. in grades K-8; \$6,000/yr. in grades 9-12) being diverted from the Pickerington Local Schools to EdChoice vouchers and private/parochial schools. If we expand the number of eligible elementary schools by two (2) additional elementary schools during 2020-2021, we will most certainly have additional kindergartners at these schools taking advantage of the scholarship, which as noted, could drain about \$66,000 per student from our funding over those students' academic careers.

But perhaps the most damaging of all is the fact that during fiscal years 2020-2021, the state funding formula created by HB 166 (133rd General Assembly) will not add these students' ADM to the funded Pickerington Local School District Formula count, yet Pickerington Local Schools will be charged \$4,650 per student so that these kindergartners/future 1st graders can attend a private/parochial school. As you may recall, section 265.220 of HB 166 has frozen the formula funding for schools for fiscal years 2020 and 2021. Other forms of funding provided by HB 166 (Student Wellness and Success, Growth Supplement) used funded ADM counts *from fiscal year 2019*. So by adding EdChoice deductions without any calculation to increase funding for those students, the entire amount of the deduction is presumably from locally voted levies and other funds.

This scholarship surely seems to be taking valuable local resources that the taxpayers of the Pickerington Community have voted to support its *local public schools* and diverting them to private/parochial schools in opposition to the public interest. These private/parochial schools are not subject to the testing standards required of public school students—the actual performance of private/parochial schools subsidized with public tax dollars may never be fully known, relative to equivalent public school evaluation standards. Our constituents and community deserve better.

Vouchers also threaten districts' ability to serve their remaining students and jeopardize the quality of those students' educational experiences. Public school districts are held to high standards and accountability, unlike private schools that do not have to use the same state tests to assess student achievement and can determine their own enrollment and admission policies. In the end, local taxpayers who never intended for their tax dollars to go to private and parochial schools lose.



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I would like to close by offering my thoughts on what would make the EdChoice program better. Many of the items that I believe would improve the program are indeed proposed by Am. Sub. HB 9.

- The proposed section ORC 3310.033 shows a lot of promise in providing that no *new scholarships* would be issued for 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 if any of the following apply to a school building:
  - a. The building receives an overall grade of A, B or C on the report card
  - b. The building receives an overall grade of D, and is not in the lowest 20% of all buildings for 2 of 3 of the most recent rankings
- Additionally, appropriating \$30MM additional under Foundation Funding line item 200550 to reimburse school district for amounts deducted for EdChoice in school year 2019-2020 is fantastic.

Additionally, I think that eliminating the eligibility afforded by ORC 3310.03(A)(6)(a) for all but eighth graders is a positive move; but I would propose that this section of law better served public interests prior to HB 166, when it appeared to require students seeking an EdChoice voucher to have been enrolled in public schools prior to applying for a high school EdChoice voucher. If a student hasn't attended a public school in most of grades K-8 to begin with, I'm not sure how that student would be negatively affected by a 'poorly' performing school that he/she never intended to attend anyway.

I also do not support increasing the family income under ORC 3310.032 to three hundred percent as amended.

I also think that a compromise that contemplates the transitions a student makes from school to school in determining EdChoice eligibility better balances the spirit of the EdChoice program and the public interests. For example, a student who is eligible to enter kindergarten in a Pickerington School that is EdChoice eligible could apply for a voucher, and I think that renewing that voucher for the *duration of the time period in which that student attends that school* could be deemed reasonable. But when that child is assigned to another school, and that public school is not EdChoice eligible, I would support a measure that ends eligibility. While I agree that this may create some disruption for the student, I believe our constituents would agree that their tax dollars should support public schools—said differently, it better serves the public interests for these tax dollars to stay with successful public schools than to continue to provide a subsidy to those who seek to get a private school education.

Thank you for your time, and please let me know if you have questions.

Respectfully,

Timothy R. Jenkins, Treasurer/CFO, on behalf of the Pickerington Local School District Board of Education