

## **Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers**

### **HB 9 Conference Committee**

**Monday, February 17, 2020**

**Sean Powers, School Counselor, Columbus City Schools**

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

I am a school counselor in a public school and I am the product of an Ohio Catholic school education. My job is to help students with their personal, social, academic, and post-secondary skills. I help students to be the best versions of themselves, while helping them to problem-solve ways that they can deal with non-academic barriers, and I help them to understand both the power they have to deal with problems on their own as well as finding ways to deal with problems that they cannot deal with individually. I help them to understand that there is significant power that exists with getting together with people who have similar difficulties. I help adults with that, too.

This is my 5th year as a school counselor. This school year I have already created and delivered programming on managing anger, using coping skills, understanding differences, dealing with stress and anxiety, utilizing restorative practices, and understanding career pathways, among other topics. Understand that I have purposefully integrated topics for elementary, middle school, and adult trainings in the above list because we can all benefit from learning more from all of the above--these are not things that we learn once and never again. However, the middle school students that I work with seem to do the best at integrating the above information, sometimes better than adults that we elect at public offices.

I am here today because, despite the fact that I love what I do, I do feel that I am burning out of my profession, and it has to do with the loss of staff that I see each year since I have been employed. I have a wonderful group of students, parents, and staff that I work with, but I never feel that I can do enough or be enough for them. This is personal for me, because I care greatly about the people that I serve. This year, for the first time, I am split between two buildings. I am at an elementary school two days/week and at a middle school three days/week. In total, my schools combined serve over 1,100 students, and for the elementary students I am their only school counselor. The middle school students that I serve have a 5-day/week school counselor as well, and we are still overwhelmed with their level of need. In addition to teaching lessons on social-emotional skills, I am responsible for being responsive to students who have urgent needs at home, completing counseling agency referrals, and providing college and career advising to all students, etc. I am additionally given the task of initiating 504 evaluations and Intervention Assistance Team meetings, which are beyond my scope of practice as a school counselor. It is an impossible job, made even more impossible by the fact that, even when I was 5 days/week at a building with fewer students, I would never get to know each student well enough to be able to provide every student with a comprehensive view of what their college and career options are, and to work with them on every skill that they would need in a school setting. And then, I am expected to market myself with data in order to advocate for my job and my profession!

Every school counselor that I have met is a professional in the highest standing who cares deeply about the work that we do, and the students that we serve. To make any assertion that public schools do not serve every student to the extent that we are able is a disrespect to the school counseling profession and displays an ignorance toward the very nature of the work that we do, and how much we are tasked with due to the lack of staff and other vital resources in public schools. We do our best to serve all, but all

