

Conference Committee on HB 9
Interested Party Testimony
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Lima City School District
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Good morning, Chairman Jones, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the EdChoice voucher program. My name is Shelly Reiff, and I am the treasurer/CFO for the Lima City Schools.

I come here today to offer my support for the recent voucher reform passed by the House, and to also urge legislators to ensure that all schools in the state of Ohio – public and private – are held to the same accountability, and that vouchers are truly a family choice.

Lima City Schools supports the efforts to move from a failing-school approach to an income-based one. The current model has done nothing but harm public schools.

And let me add – we are not a failing school system and the measure in place that indicates differently, is highly flawed. If you step inside our doors, one will clearly witness the vast opportunities that are available to our students.

We also support the move to state-funded vouchers instead of the current system, which takes local public tax dollars away from schools like ours, and sends them to pay private school tuitions.

Under the current expanded voucher program, the Lima City Schools is losing an additional \$150,000 this school year. It's unfair to our district, to our students and our taxpayers. If the state wants a voucher program, then it should be willing to pay for it.

Let me give you some numbers to show why the current system is broken and how people, for years, have taken advantage of taxpayers who believed their tax dollars funded their local public school district.

One Lima-area private high school has 125 of our students on vouchers. Fifty-one of those students have never been enrolled in our school district or any public school district. And 30 have done what we call “short enrollment” – they hop over and enroll in the Lima City Schools for a small window of time (around 45 days) to

make them eligible for a voucher. They then take their voucher and return to their private school.

Another private high school has 13 students who reside in our school district – 10 of the 13 have never been our students. Taxpayer dollars that were voted in for the public school system have funded their private education for years.

The other side of this are those public school families who have decided to try private schools under the voucher program but have been turned away.

The original purpose of the voucher program was to give parents a choice. But, really, whose choice is it?

I might want my child to attend a private school and apply for a voucher, but that does not mean my child is going to be accepted to that school.

If he is a good student with no discipline issues, then yes, I will probably get that voucher. But if he is not, the choice is no longer mine. The private school will decide if they want my child and if they want to keep him.

Where in this system is parental choice?

If we truly want to have a successful voucher program that works for all families and all students, then there must be accountability for all.

Private schools receiving voucher students must be held to the same standards and expectations as we are. This includes everything from EMIS reporting to teacher certification and state-mandated testing.

Someone may ask, how is this any different than open enrollment? With open enrollment, the transfer is from a public school to a public school. Students who go out on open enrollment, go to schools that are held accountable by both the state and the parents. All private schools need to be held to the same standards.

If we sincerely want what is best for the students in Lima, and every community in the state of Ohio, then we must create a system that holds everyone equally accountable, and makes way for **all** students to succeed.

Thank You