



Toledo Public Schools
Board of Education
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Stephanie Eichenberg, Toledo Public Schools, Testimony for the Conference Committee for House Bill 9

Chairman Jones and members of the Conference Committee on House Bill 9, thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony this morning.

House Bill 9 is imperfect in its impact in reigning in the exponential growth of EdChoice vouchers, but it is progress in the right direction. This year, Toledo Public Schools is required to fund an additional \$5.7 million dollars in Ed Choice scholarships with a total deduction of over \$15 million, and an increase of over 1,000 more students than in the prior years. Even more frustrating over 1,100 of the new EdChoice recipients were not students who attended Toledo Public Schools.

Governor DeWine recently noted that it's important that we recall the original intent of private school vouchers, which was to help students without means to escape failing schools. If a student has never spent time in Toledo Public Schools, they are not escaping a failing school they are simply reacting to marketing or religious preference.

A second issue with this premise is that it assumes we've perfected a system of evaluating schools, and this body knows that we have not. Another issue is that it uses my least favorite metric in the current card, the Progress or Value Add component. I will leave it to my affluent counterparts to comment on the ridiculousness of the Value Add qualifier. I cannot skip over the fact that our current report card criteria are applied only to the public schools from which vouchers funds are deducted, and not to the schools that receive the voucher funds. We talk about choice as if it's enabling a free market of education, but a fair and free market means you have perfect, comparable information. Parents in Ohio do not have perfect, comparable information.

If you are an education insider, one can easily pull apart the premise of students receiving a superior education at voucher recipient schools. If I take the elementary school with the highest percentage of EdChoice Voucher students in Toledo (@87%), and compare it to its 3 nearest TPS schools geographically, the 3rd grade proficiency rates on ELA and Math are about 1.5% higher for the private school, but the 6th grade proficiency rates are both a full 20 percentage points lower for the private institution.

For the private high school with the highest percentage of students using TPS funded vouchers (@68%), Toledo Public Schools proficiency rates on the component Math and ELA tests are all higher than the combined Math and ELA proficiency rates for the private school. There is no clear academic advantage demonstrated through proficiency testing. Toledo Public Schools accept every student, and private schools can choose who they admit.

Nearly all the dollars we spend on EdChoice are for religious institutions. As a product of both public and private education, I do understand that parents choose for various reasons to send their child to a religiously affiliated school in or near my district. What I don't understand is why religious school students are being preferenced in their state funding over our public-school students?

My daughter, an 8th grader at a Toledo Public Schools is a standard student, she does not receive gifted services, she does not receive special education services. The state allots TPS about \$4,800 for her education. Yet for parents who send their student to one of the two private schools down the street, the state allots the 8th grade student a scholarship of \$4,650 and over \$900 per student in auxiliary services funds. Why is my child worth less to the state? Why is any Toledo Public Schools student worth less? And why do we have to take EdChoice funds and deduct them from my child's education to fund someone else's private school education? I guarantee you as a district, for reasons of equity, our \$5.7M increase in EdChoice deductions impacts every student in the district, not only those in our EdChoice designated buildings.

By opening Ed Choice criteria to students who never once stepped foot in our buildings, the state has chosen to fund more students without increasing funding dollars, and given preference to guarantee per pupil funding only for students attending private schools regardless of academic performance, schools that are typically religious and that have admissions criteria.

I urge you not only to pass House Bill 9, but to remove "performance" related vouchers entirely, and move to an income based criteria funded directly from the state with not more than the proportion of funding allotted in years prior to 2019-2020. Let's acknowledge that we as a state actively sandbag the ability to compare private schools to public schools. I further urge that any school accepting voucher funding be subject to the same graduation criteria, and the same level of governance transparency. Let's make "choice" be real "choice," not an anti-public education initiative.