

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 conference committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Trevor Thomas, superintendent of Heath City Schools.

Heath City Schools is a medium sized district that serves 1750 students. We are a district that earned above average (B) student growth for the last four years, as well as a C as an overall grade for our district. We serve a wide range of students, and have excelled in growing students in the lowest 20% of achievers, students with disabilities, and our gifted students grew at the level of an A on the value-added measure on the state report card. Our district has shown continued academic improvement over the last five years.

Unfortunately, our district received a D on the K-3 Literacy Measure on the most recent report card, yet 100% of our students met the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Because of this D, we have two buildings where students are now eligible for an EdChoice Performance voucher, yet the D is obtained by measuring less than 20% of our K-3 students.

EdChoice was originally created to serve students of schools that are in state takeover. These schools were also primarily located in urban, high poverty areas where the poverty was so extreme that the parents had no other choice than to remain in their school district of residence. I would also point out that these districts likely struggled with employing high quality teachers, obtaining appropriate resources to serve their students, and were unable to obtain enough parent engagement to properly support their students.

The recent expansion of EdChoice will either or both, increase the number of performance based scholarships to more than double the current amount, and widen the definition of a failing school to a level where above average school buildings (according to the state report card) will be included. As important, if you increase the income threshold to 300% or higher of the federal poverty level, you will open the program to the majority of students in ALL school districts. Is this the intent of a program that was originally created to serve students who were in a district that had been taken over by the state?

I have heard private school advocates state that the money should follow the child. If this is the case, then why not hold the institutions where the money follows to two criteria that public schools have always been held to:

1. Have standardized acceptance criteria that absolutely prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, income, race or sex.
2. Require these institutions serve students with disabilities, students of poverty, and title 1 students based on income or achievement level.

Currently, our public schools are required to offer services from our federal funding to private school students in need of remediation and special education intervention. If tax dollars are

going to be diverted to private schools, that responsibility and service should be provided by the private schools.

I want to share as well that my words are not intended to disrespect private schools, private school parents or private school students; as I have deep respect for any educator who works for kids, and specifically I think everyone in this room is here because they are doing what they believe to be best for either their students, or their children. My passion for public education comes from a place of 18 years of experience serving all students in high poverty school districts.

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. I am happy to address your questions.