

## Board of Education

Testimony on HB 9 – Educational Choice bill

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Chairman Jones and members of the Committee. Sincere thanks for the opportunity to speak with you about Educational Choice. Your time and dedication to this matter is appreciated and so very welcomed at such a critical time in public education.

My name is Vicki Donovan Lyle and it has been a privilege to serve on the Sylvania Board of Education for the last 16 years. Much has changed in our world since 2004 but public education remains a guaranteed right to all children within the framework of the constitution. It is critical that we continue access to, and adequately fund, public education, while requiring accountability from **all** institutions receiving hard-earned taxpayer dollars.

Sylvania Schools had two elementary schools designated last year and one more joins the massive list of designees this year. With more than one-third of our Ohio public schools designated as failing it is incumbent upon us to address and fix the broken system. Simply stated, the program is failing at its mission – purportedly allowing students from under-performing schools to enroll in schools that succeed.

Let's first consider the flawed system by which schools are designated. Educational Choice uses one isolated metric – like Value Add – and ignores all others when designating a school as failing. Schools are not evaluated holistically, and this is a fatal flaw. We need to look no further than Parkside Elementary in Solon, Ohio or Sylvania's Hillview Elementary as examples.

Both schools were added to most recent list of EdChoice schools. In Parkland's case, 99% of students are proficient in math and 96% in reading. Doomed because of the "Value Add" criteria, a school performing at such high levels has nowhere to go. At Hillview, where 50% of our students are on free and reduced lunch, the school received an "A" in Gap Closing, advancing our most vulnerable students – those who are economically disadvantaged or disabled. In stark and contrasting examples, we see the system has failed. A component of a subcomponent cannot, and should not, define a school as failing. The system is broken.

Within our three designated schools we are serving a varied and diverse population and doing it well. Staff teach a rigorous and well-rounded education and model great values. Hillview's backpack program served families in need of food to be sustained through the weekend. Whiteford has a growing ESL population for which the school provides translation services and clothes. Stranahan serves its families who need warm coats, hats and gloves to protect from the Northwest Ohio winter. A Leadership program models solid work ethic

and programs and staff are in place to remove language and financial barriers from its ever-increasing ESL population.

If the language contained in your bill was the current law none of our schools would be on the list. Let me repeat that. None of our Sylvania Schools would be now – or in the future – on the list with your proposed language.

Secondarily, there is no proof that private schools are succeeding under the same criteria demanded of public schools. With no metrics and accountability, it is purely speculation that students will receive a better education elsewhere. In fact, we looked at the statistics for all **nine private schools that our Sylvania students attend with vouchers. What did we learn? That we outperform every single one of them in every measure of proficiency.**

We recognize and appreciate choice in education. If private schools were held to the same rigor and accountability as public schools, we may all have joined in a fight together as it relates to the State Report Card instead of pitted against one another in an uneven battle. Our hard-working tax paying residents chose Sylvania for a variety of reasons but many for the outstanding school system. It is not their obligation under the constitution or otherwise to pay for the choices that others may make.

We appreciate the work you have done to craft this language. I urge the House Primary and Secondary Committee to support HB 9 and remove “performance” related vouchers entirely. Move to an income-based criterion funded from the State. Many schools are undeservedly designated as Educational Choice. We have replaced the grades with this scarlet letter, and it is a social injustice. You have the power to fix that and our families deserve it. Thank you.

