

February 14, 2020

Dear Ohio Legislators,

Parental choice means that parents, as primary educator, having the right to select the educational setting that best fits the individual needs of their child. Education must be a right and not a privilege. Children have the right to learn in a safe environment that addresses their individual needs. It is important that a student achieves up to his or her maximum potential and success should not be hindered because of the environment in which the student is being educated. Parental Choice leads to student success.

I am the product of a public education and have a lot of respect for what public schools do. For the past 20 years however, I have held several positions within the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and have a very deep appreciation for what private schools do as well. It did not take me long to realize that education is not one size fits all and parents need options for choice; especially those who could not afford choice otherwise.

It has been my privilege to work within two urban schools, both with high numbers of students attending only because their family was able to obtain an Ohio EdChoice Scholarship. One school was located within the Dayton Public District and the other within Cincinnati Public. I have witnessed first-hand the difference that a Catholic education made in a student's life. Many of our students continue to come to us from underperforming districts and I can tell you first hand the efforts that our teachers and administrators undertake to get a child to achieve to his or her maximum potential. I witnessed teachers working from sun up to sun set and even tutoring in the summer to get students where they need to be.

For the past three and a half years I have served in an assistant superintendent capacity for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. A large amount of my time is devoted to school health and vitality. 26% of our current (K-12) students attend one of our 107 schools through the assistance provided by an Ohio EdChoice Scholarship. This represents 10,044 students spread over the 19 counties of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. 81% of our EdChoice students are currently on a "Traditional Scholarship". These students are male, female, Catholic, Non-Catholic, black, white, Asian, Latino and Hispanic. These students represent the urban areas of Dayton and Cincinnati, the suburban areas such as West

Chester, Beavercreek and lastly our great farming communities such as rural areas of Clark and Shelby counties. Many of these students have one thing in common; their parents have been provided with an opportunity that they would not have had without our Ohio EdChoice Scholarship program.

There are many rumors circulating about Catholic and other private schools not being accountable and taking away funds that could be allocated to public schools. Our schools are accountable through state testing for EdChoice, as well as the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Some have said that our teachers do not have degrees, again this is not true. The EdChoice program currently accounts for around 3% of the total state enrollment and less than 1% of the total budget for education.

Public schools rely almost solely on state and local funding to operate, whereas Catholic and other private schools are totally different. Our schools rely heavily on philanthropy. The 23 high schools within our Archdiocese offer over 25MM a year in financial aid, on top of what EdChoice and the families are providing. Our Catholic parishes and schools offset the cost of education through the generosity of Sunday contributions, annual funds, festivals, galas, raffles, candy bar sales, etc. Even with all of the things that I just mentioned, it is still very tough for many families to afford the education of their choice.

Last week our Archdiocese awarded financial aid scholarships. When reviewing the financial aid applications, I always get a deeper appreciation for the struggles and sacrifices that our families make. Very often, I see middle class families living well within their means and yet struggle to afford a private education. These families live in a modestly priced home, have zero credit card debt, drive older cars and contribute very little or nothing to retirement. These families also pay property taxes which help support the public schools around them, but choose not to send their children to a public school for a reason. Most times it is because these schools are failing to provide safety, academic quality, etc.

My concerns about the future are very straightforward. I also want to make it perfectly clear; I am not concerned about individual schools. I am concerned about the current and future students in the State of Ohio. Any changes to the Ohio EdChoice Scholarship program must:

1. Address TRULY underperforming public schools, especially in our urban areas.
2. Address our students currently attending underperforming schools, as well as their siblings.
3. Provide choice to the middleclass tax paying constituents, up to 400% of the federal poverty level guidelines.
4. Have a clear plan on how to fund the program moving forward; addressing all who will qualify.

In closing, I ask for just one thing. Please leave the current law as it is and spend the next year assembling a school choice program that works for all in the future. Ohio has been a national leader in regards to education and we MUST continue to be. Any program changes that do not address the items that I just mentioned would be two steps backwards.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vince Woodall", written over a light grey background.

Vince Woodall

Deputy Superintendent for Operational Vitality  
Archdiocese of Cincinnati