

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 conference committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program and the new Transfer Territory law. My name is Brent May and I am the Superintendent in the Plain Local School District located in Stark County. I am here representing over 6000 students and over 30,000 residents in Plain Township. I am also here representing the amazing public-school educators in Plain Local that I have the honor to work with each and every day. I also see their work as a father of three children that attend the Plain Local School District and they have made a major impact in the lives of my three kids! Without these public-school teachers and their dedication, my own children would not be who they are today. These educators have taken an interest in my children and provided daily encouragement to ensure they meet their maximum potential. I will be forever grateful for those teachers!!

The Plain Local School District is a large diverse suburban school district located in the heart of Stark County. We have students from every background that you would see in America. This diversity makes us unique and special. The staff in Plain Local meet the needs of a diverse learner every day and their students excel in academics, arts and athletics. We are proud of our diversity and we celebrate that aspect in our community. I would like to take a few minutes this evening and tell our story in Plain Local, a district that serves all students, no matter their background or zip code.

I will first begin with the most important aspect in education, academics.

- Recently, we have added an International Baccalaureate Program at GlenOak High School. We are only 1 of 22 high schools in Ohio that have this program. This is our second year offering a full IB diploma program. We also offer single classes in the IB program. We are preparing to graduate 25 students in the full program and have over 80 students taking individual courses. This program is open to all students. We have provided advisors and counselors to ensure they are successful.
- We have over 300 students taking American Sign Language as a foreign language at our high school. This program has exploded and our students and families are excited with this new offering. In addition, students can take Chinese and Spanish. All of these courses are offered at the Honors and AP level.
- GlenOak High School houses 17 Career and Technical Programs that impact over 900 students. We collaborate with three other districts to offer a wide variety of programming for all students.
- Our middle school and high school offer a full orchestra program. Our students are learning the benefits of playing an instrument and learning through the arts.
- We offer dance, drama, art, choir, band and strings beginning at the 6th grade level.
- We offer on-line learning and blended learning for students in the evening hours to better meet family needs.
- GlenOak High School has been ranked as a Top Performing High School by U.S. News and World Report for the past 5 years.

- Hundreds of GlenOak High School students are taking College Credit Plus courses at many local colleges and universities
- Our elementary and intermediate schools have been recognized as high performing schools by the state of Ohio
- One of our elementary school have been recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School.
- And finally, we employ some of best educators in Ohio, who accept any child into their classroom and work tirelessly to meet their needs in an ever-changing world!!

These are only a few areas that highlight the excellence in Plain Local Schools

Now, let me discuss the area of mental health and how that has become a focus area for public school districts. We have seen a large growth in this area of need across the county and we are addressing these needs in Plain Local

- We recently opened a full-service mental health facility on the campus of GlenOak High School with Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health. We provide instant access to services and resources for all families in our community and Stark County. This has been a game changer in the lives of many of our students and their families.
- We have employed 13 licensed clinical mental health counselors working in our 9 school buildings every day
- We have employed Social Workers at our high school and Family Community Liaisons at each of our 9 building locations.
- We collaborate with United Way of Stark County to house Care Teams at each building. These teams discuss students and family needs weekly at all buildings. Their goal is to ensure services and resources for all families
- We have food pantries and clothing closets at each school for any family or student in need. The clothing closet is open to our community in the evening.
- Additional school psychologists and school counselors have been hired to address and meet the diverse needs of our students and families, and they do it better than anyone!

Why do I highlight these areas? Because they are all at risk if we continue with the EdChoice Scholarship program and Transfer of Territory law in Ohio. There will come a time soon when tough decisions will need to be made regarding these amazing services and opportunities for all students with a loss of funding. We meet the needs of every child, we do not pick them, and we are committed to providing the best public education possible for the students in Plain Local. We have listened to our community when they have told us they need additional services. We have listened to our community when they wanted programming increased. And finally, we have partnered with multiple local and state agencies to improve the lifestyle in our community. That is what we do in public education, we provide to make every community a better place. There are no boundaries and no selection processes for those we serve. That is the difference that we are making every day in Stark County.

In addition to dealing with loss of \$600,000 due to the EdChoice Voucher system, Plain Local could also lose valuable funding because of legislation that was placed in the budget bill at the last minute without any opportunity for the public to provide input.

Basically, referred to as the Territory Transfer Law, allows electors living in a township that is split between two or more districts to petition for the transfer of territory from their current school district to another adjacent district. It only takes 10% of the electors living in the territory to be transferred to sign a petition and submit it to the district they wish to leave. The law requires the district to place the proposal on the ballot for the next election. If the proposal (only voted on by those in the area to be transferred) is passed, neither ODE, the “losing” district, or the “receiving” district can contest it.

This flawed legislation holds the promise of causing chaos across Ohio as any group of electors, no matter how big the group, can petition to have their territory transferred from one school district to another. Plain Local is dealing with this situation right now, as two different sets of petitions have been filed with Plain Local to transfer property from our school district to neighboring districts. Should these ballot initiatives be approved, Plain Local stands to lose another \$630,000 in annual revenue.

The loss of funding with EdChoice and Transfer of Territory law will negatively impact the Plain Local School District. Students and families will lose opportunities and services that no one else in our community can fill. Our families will take a step backward and the erosion of our community will begin. We must be better at supporting the work of public education in Ohio, and I believe we can be better. Our students are depending on us!!

In closing, I respectfully ask that you consider supporting Senate Bill 89 and not HB 9. Senate Bill 89 phases out the performance-based voucher system, paid for by local districts, in favor of an income-based system, paid for by the state. SB 89 also sunsets the Territory Transfer law on September 1. I would ask you to consider sunseting that legislation immediately with emergency passage of SB 89. Waiting until September gives people the ability to place transfer initiatives on the November ballot. I would hate to see other districts go through what Plain Local is experiencing with this Territory Transfer law.

Public dollars should stay with public schools so the services and opportunities I highlighted tonight can continue in communities across Ohio. Public schools provide an environment where **every** child can succeed, no matter their background or zip code, and that should be supported and celebrated in the state of Ohio.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 conference committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding Ohio’s EdChoice Voucher program and the Transfer of Territory law. I am happy to address your questions.