

GOSHEN LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Darrell Edwards, superintendent of Goshen Local Schools. I am here today to encourage the committee to adopt meaningful voucher reforms as passed by the Ohio House.

The "failing schools" model that the EdChoice Voucher expansion program is based upon will fail Ohio. It undervalues the incredible work of our public school teachers, it ignores the tremendous power of school districts and communities working together on behalf of families, and, most importantly, it threatens to fail our students as they seek a path towards success in school and in life after graduation.

In my nine years as superintendent of Goshen Local Schools, the legislature has changed the accountability measures that PUBLIC school districts and Ohio's students are held accountable for many, many times. Districts, students, and their families are forced to react to changes that affect lives long after graduation. Each of these metrics they choose to judge the success of public schools are based upon assessments that we know the greatest predictor of success may be what their parent's income is, not necessarily the school providing the education.

Now, today, some think it is time to base school choice on metrics that have consistently been tweaked or even overhauled every year and whose accuracy as a sole means of determining the effectiveness of schools is questionable.

What I do think is fair and accurate data is that each time the rules of the game have changed, Ohio teachers and students all across the state have adapted and overcome. I am not opposed to accountability. I embrace it. I believe we should be reporting the work we're doing for Ohio's public school students and their families. I believe that accountability measures in the past have encouraged school improvement and I believe our schools are being successful.

To illustrate this, I want you to hear about the work we do at Goshen Local Schools. I want you to keep in mind the following numbers because as a public school district, we cannot turn students away, and there is not an application process. We open our doors to 2,949 awesome kids every day. While every student is unique, our student body demographics paint a picture:

- 52%- Economically Disadvantaged
- 45% - Medicaid eligible
- 18% Students with disabilities, 100% of whom receive special education services
- 23% Students identified as gifted 100% of whom receive gifted services

Through the talent and determination of great public school teachers, support staff, and community support, here is what our students are accomplishing. Note that many of these achievements are not on the state report card, nor can they be measured by a point-in-time test:

- As a district, we earned an A on the Local Report Card's Gap closing measure! We meet all students at their current level and strive to take them as far as they can go!
- Goshen High School's graduation rate for the class of 2019 was 98.4%, even with the many changes to graduation requirements over the years!
- Goshen High School was named a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence by the United States Department of Education.
- Over the years, Goshen High School was recognized by the Ohio Department of Education as one of around 50 "High Performing Schools of Honor" in Ohio.
- In past years, Goshen Middle School and Spaulding Elementary have been recognized in the past as "Schools of Promise" for their high academic achievement by the State of Ohio.
- Goshen High School has 93 hours of college credit opportunities available on campus resulting in savings to their families when they leave our doors and go on to college.
- Between College Credit Plus and AP classes, GHS students earned 1,429 college credit hours without leaving Goshen High School in one year alone!
- 12 Advanced Placement Classes are offered at Goshen High School: Literature, Composition, Government, Psychology, American History, Biology, Chemistry, Music Theory, Environmental Science, Calculus, Statistics, and Comparative Government. These courses provide motivated and academically prepared students with the opportunity to study and learn at the college level on our campus.
- 16 College Credit Plus classes are offered at GHS: 6 UC Informational Technology, 3 Engineering courses, College Trigonometry, Western Civilization, College Algebra, Composition I and Composition II, Introduction to Education, Pre Calculus, Chemistry, and Sociology.
- GHS students have the opportunity to earn industry credentials in a variety of fields before graduation. There were 64 credentials earned on campus during the 2018-2019 academic school year and that will probably be tripled this year.
- Every GHS student is offered ACT prep courses both during and after school to help prepare students for success on the ACT.
- Goshen seniors earned over 4.6 million dollars in college scholarships last year.
- At Spaulding Elementary NO 3rd-grade students have been retained for failing to meet the rigorous Third Grade Reading Guarantee in 2017, 2018 and 2019.
- US News and World Reports 2019 ranking of Best Public High Schools recognized Goshen High School in the top 10% in the state of Ohio and the top 8% nationally.
- Goshen Early Childhood Education Programs earned the State of Ohio's highest rating; 5 Stars!!

- Goshen Middle School was named an Ohio Schools to Watch and a National Forum Schools to Watch, in 2016-2017 and were just redesignated in 2020. And they are considered a failing school and open to the school choice with the expansion of the EdChoice voucher program.

This is made possible on a daily basis through the miracles our teachers work with students. Every student. We accept every kid that comes to our doors. It doesn't matter what your family income is. Every kid is accepted irregardless of their strengths or weaknesses. 18% of our students have a disability--that is 552 students. Many of these students have profound disabilities and we are held accountable for their results on state tests. We don't turn any of them away. I will share with you that last month, we had a parent come to enroll three children that had been denied attendance or uninvited by the private school they attended due to behavioral concerns. Each of those students upon enrolling have been placed in programs that meet their needs. We didn't turn them away. We don't pick and choose. Instead, we choose to make a difference and instill hope and a future in all kids.

All of this is accomplished through the hard work of our staff and a compassionate caring heart for all kids, including those that don't have as much financially as a family that most of us do. Our staff and community provided Christmas gifts for hundreds of families, provide "Warrior Packs" or food for the weekend for children that are in danger of being hungry on the weekend, and the hat is passed constantly to ensure that every child's needs are met. Miracles are then worked--I said 98.4% of all of our students graduated last year--97.8% of our economically disadvantaged kids graduated.

Who would call this a district with a failing school? The EdChoice performance-based voucher system does! At Goshen, we ask our students to leave a legacy and I ask the Ohio legislature to help us do just that. Leave a legacy that is not political, but set up for Ohio public school students, not for families that already choose a different path for their child's education and now just want taxpayers to pay for it. Why would we intentionally try to make it appear that Ohio's schools are failing? I think it is time to celebrate the work our great public schools in Ohio are doing instead of bashing them. Why would we want to make it appear to potential businesses moving into Ohio that our schools are failing?

We can do better for Ohio students, schools, and parents. Legislators, educators, and parents must truly collaborate and develop a school accountability system that works for Ohio--one that is not based upon your zip code or who your parents are but one that truly measures the work that our educators accomplish with our students every day. I believe Ohio can do far better than draining much-needed resources from public schools that accept all students to fund the private education of others.

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.