

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 Dr. Joe Clark, superintendent of the Nordonia Hills City Schools in Summit County.

My 10 older siblings and I all attended Catholic schools. It was my parents' decision not to choose the tuition-free public schools established by the Ohio state constitution, and they willingly paid the private school tuition. My wife and I also chose to send our oldest son to Catholic school, and we willingly paid the private school tuition.

In Nordonia, Ledgeview Elementary School serves students in grades K-4. Ledgeview was recently the winner of the prestigious National Blue Ribbon Award. The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes public and private elementary, middle, and high schools based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. Ledgeview excels in both areas, showing incredible work in achievement and closing the gaps for all of our student subgroups. Ledgeview has an active and vibrant PTA and outstanding programs in music, art and coding.

But according to the current rules for EdChoice, Ledgeview is an underperforming school. Nobody with an objective bone in their body could spend any amount of time at Ledgeview and determine it is an underperforming school. Ledgeview is the type of school that causes families to seek homes in the attendance area. It is a destination school.

But according to EdChoice, it is underperforming and families should be able to take public tax dollars to pay private school tuition to schools that have no evidence that they can hold a candle to Ledgeview, as private schools do not have the same accountability measures public schools do.

But let's pretend for a minute that Ledgeview is underperforming. And let's pretend the private school providers are better schools than Ledgeview.

My fundamental concern with EdChoice is that it perpetuates discriminatory practices. If we concede that Ledgeview is failing, and we concede that the private school providers are the panacea that will save students from failing schools, how is it that private schools can deny admission to any of Ledgeview's students based on whatever criteria they choose? Private schools can deny students based on their academic performance, which one could rightly blame on the supposedly underperforming schools they attend. Private schools can also deny students who are disabled, students in the LGBTQ community, and students of any other subgroup under the guise of not meeting arbitrary enrollment standards. But public schools must, and do, educate all students.

If the purpose of EdChoice is truly to provide a better option for struggling students, why aren't private schools required to accept every student that applies? If the private school doesn't have space, why aren't they forced to create space like public schools must when their enrollment increases? Why aren't private schools required to provide special education services to students?

Because EdChoice is not about providing opportunities for kids in underperforming schools. EdChoice is about two things. One, it is about financially supporting Catholic schools who are losing enrollment, since the spotlight was shone on the Church's sex abuse scandal and coverup, and

losing financial assistance from the Church, which has spent millions of dollars in settlements in these cases.

Two, EdChoice funds the white flight of middle- and upper-middle class students away from students of poverty, minorities and the disabled. If I am wrong, please show me the demographics of students who take EdChoice money to go to private schools. And then show me the changing demographics of the public schools they are leaving. My belief is you will find a scenario ripe for a disparate impact Title VI claim.

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.