

Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers
HB 9 Conference Committee
Tuesday, February 17, 2020

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Joy Bock. I am a teacher in the Groveport Madison Local Schools and I serve as President of the Groveport Madison Local Education Association. On behalf of our 429 members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the EdChoice Voucher Program.

The problems with the current EdChoice program are well documented. In 2017 Groveport Madison had 1 school on the EdChoice eligibility list. This year we have 4 schools on the list and next year 6 of our 10 schools will be on the EdChoice eligibility list. This explosion in the number of schools eligible for vouchers in my district – and statewide – is the result of reliance upon a school report card system that nearly everyone agrees is broken to determine eligibility. As a result of this flawed system, schools that are otherwise performing well are unfairly labeled as “failing”.

House Bill 9, as passed by the Senate, attempts to address this dramatic increase in voucher eligible schools by exempting buildings rated A, B or C and those with a D that are not in the lowest 20% on the performance index indicator. While I appreciate the attempt by the Senate to address this issue, this is a temporary fix that is still dependent on a flawed school report card. I support the solution passed by the House in SB 89 that ends the reliance on a broken accountability system that blames and shames public schools but, instead, would award vouchers to students based on family income up to 250% of poverty level.

The House approach puts an end to a system that drains resources by deducting the voucher amounts from public schools like ours. In fact, we just passed a much-needed levy after years of failing to do so. However, last year we had over \$900,000 deducted from our general fund for vouchers. This year that amount nearly doubled to over \$1.7 million and will go even higher next year. The renewal levy we just passed will generate \$5.6 million in needed revenue but we are going to have to tell our voters that 30% of the money they just agreed to pay in taxes will fund students going to private schools and not their own local public schools.

I urge the members of this committee to lead your respective chambers to find a fair solution that does not drain revenues from public schools. I believe the solution presented by the House in SB 89 is the fairest way to support public education while providing school choice to students in poverty and holding district budgets harmless. SB 89 also halts the advance of the flawed “failing schools” narrative perpetuated by the current EdChoice system.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony.