

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 Matthew Miller, superintendent of Lakota Local Schools in Butler County.

I join many of my colleagues and fellow advocates for public education in the state of Ohio during these hearings. I am here today to encourage the committee to adopt the transformative voucher reforms as passed by the Ohio House.

The income-based approach is much healthier because it focuses on what really matters, which is equal opportunity for young people. It's important to remember that's why we are all here.

The House plan utilizes the state to fund these vouchers. It only makes sense that if the state is going to issue vouchers, the state should pay for them, not use some sort of shell game to prop them up with locally voted property taxes.

Imagine being a superintendent or a school board member or a teacher and trying to justify this shell game to people in your community – especially when you're trying to pass a levy. Sadly, many school districts are going to need to pass new and additional levies merely to fund EdChoice. That's not a situation we should be in, nor one where we should be spending our already limited resources.

I embrace a meaningful, purposeful, and transparent accountability system for our schools. We certainly don't have that now and that's a necessity before a flawed voucher system can be fixed – one that clearly should be set on an income-based approach.

While many schools have been deemed as "failing", I can assure you that most of them are achieving at exceptional rates and levels. Our teachers and staff members see their students as highly capable of exceeding their expectations, and quite frankly, exceeding yours as well. The accountability system we use has put us in this untenable situation.

What would Ohio look like if we worked collaboratively to bolster our education system with representative voices at the table, instead of tearing down our public schools by using inflammatory rhetoric and a rigged accountability system? Miracles happen every day in our public schools – because our state has educators who move kids forward based on their interests, their skill sets, their passions.

Your flawed accountability system isn't what our local, statewide, national or global businesses need or want. I know because we've asked our communities and businesses what they want from our kids. We've listened, we've been responsive and we've shifted to an education system based on what comes after graduation – not a system that works too hard for things that ultimately don't matter.

In Lakota, and at many other school districts in Ohio, we work around your insurmountable and flawed goals. We are not interested in investing our current and future talents in meeting a flawed accountability system. We're outworking and out hustling you to give our students their best chance of success. While it would be so much easier for us to put all of our attention on getting better test scores – it's not what our students need, it's not what our workforce desires and it's not what's going to make Ohio the best state in the Union.

Our students and teachers are spending too much time on state- and federally-mandated testing. These are not diagnostic tests designed to help inform and improve the education we are providing to students. These are high-pressure, high-stakes tests that have taken on a life of their own.

I believe we can do better if all of us – legislators, educators, parents and other stakeholders interested in investing in our future – truly collaborate and develop a school accountability system that works for Ohio schools and, most importantly, Ohio students.

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.