

February 17th, 2020

Primary and Secondary Committee Members,

I am writing today regarding the proposed amendments made to the House Bill 9 in order to lessen the number of schools that have been added to the eligibility list and other changes that might be made to convert to income-only based vouchers. I currently have three children who would be eligible for the scholarship this year based on their school district receiving an overall D rating.

Two of my kids are already each in two different community schools and third is open-enrolled in another nearby school district. Our assigned school district is already paying out more money for my children to these other schools than if we were to take advantage of the EdChoice scholarship. If the students are unhappy, bullied or underserved by their local school district, we as parents will find a way to put them into a school where they will achieve their highest potential. That is what the freedom of choice is all about, this is what the EdChoice program is all about. This argument against EdChoice is more about taking away those choices than it is about the money coming out the budget.

The argument against EdChoice is that the schools are losing money due to the fact that they have to pay out these scholarships to the parents in order to be used at the private school of their choice, because the student in question is not actually attending their school. Nevermind that a typical school district receives more money in tax dollars per student than they would have to pay out, and has one less student to educate, so they are actually making money per student in this scenario. But there are a few other points:

1. There are a limited number of scholarships available.
2. Through open enrollment and charter school options, these schools are also required to transfer money out of their budget to these other schools. This is a larger dollar amount and also is unlimited.
3. A lot of schools who were already eligible for these scholarships and have been paying them for many years.
4. Should a school be entitled to monies associated with educating a student when the student is not attending that school?

Why is the committee seeking to limit only the scholarship given to the parent when these schools already pay other public and charter schools? And why now? When those same students who are seeking to utilize this EdChoice scholarship could turn around and join a charter school or other public school through open enrollment resulting in the district losing even more money.

I also understand that the issue is that a larger number of schools are eligible to have these scholarships deducted this year than in previous years. And it does seem that if a school is receiving an overall grade of A, B or C, then they probably should not be on the list. However I do not understand if a school is rated a D or below how it should be removed from the list based on whether they are in the lowest 20% of all schools on the list. My children cannot attend those other schools that are higher or lower on the list.

There is a private school that can meet the needs of all my children and would allow for them to all attend the same school. But if their D rated school is removed from the eligibility list, they will still not be attending their assigned school district. They will still attend their charter schools and open enrolled school in another district, our assigned school district will still "lose money". And Ohioans will be losing out on an opportunity to protect and enhance the freedom of choice.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sarah Felske