

**Testimony Against Ed Choice  
Presented by Tamara S. Wallace  
Tuesday, February 18, 2020**

Good evening members of the conference committee. My name is Tamara Wallace. I am a resident of Findlay, Ohio, but tonight am representing Mohawk Local Schools, the district I serve in Wyandot County. I have been an educator for 28 years and an administrator for 13. I am here tonight to speak against performance-based vouchers.

I am the proud principal of 534 PreK-6 students who are now attending a “Failing School.” We didn’t know we were a failing school until late last fall when we joined two-thirds of the rest of the state’s public school districts and over 1,200 buildings on a contrived and misinformed “naughty list.” Through an amendment in an unrelated bill that was passed without public input, we became a “Failing School” overnight, in spite of marked improvement in our performance over the last several years. My building’s performance has never fallen low enough to require any level of accountability through our state support team, certainly not close to needing a building reading achievement plan and we are not even required to participate in the Ohio Improvement Process.

Yet, with one stroke of a pen last fall, we are now a “Failing School.” In our best estimation, since we have not been provided with a clear indication of why we have been slapped with this label, is that we had an F on the K-3 literacy measure based on our 2017-2018 local report card data. A measure, by the way, that House Speaker Larry Householder has said is based upon “mangled metrics.”

I feel the intense need to defend our students, teachers, school and to help you understand that we are most likely on the “Failing School” list due to a matter of 14 points on the Third Grade ELA State Test pointing back to 2 specific students. If you are going to punish us, in retrospect, without making everyone aware of the implications ahead of time, you need to be made to understand where our K-3 literacy grade for 17-18 was contrived from.

In the fall of 2014, the year before I was hired, our two students entered kindergarten at the age of six. Within 30 days of starting their school experience, they were required to sit down and completed a mandated reading diagnostic assessment. At that point, we were using a vendor- approved NWEA MAP test which was administered on a computer and is much more rigorous than the state-provided diagnostic materials. These two students were “on-track” for Kindergarten. Note that if a student is off-track, we are required to write and implement a student Reading Improvement Plan or RIMP within 60 days of completing the diagnostic. This is a key point that will circle back in our story.

The next fall, 2015, the two seven years olds once again sat down and took a 45-minute computerized assessment. They were reported in the Education Management Information System as “on-track” readers. As second graders in the fall of 2016, they once again took the mandated diagnostic and were again “on track” readers. When fall of 2017 arrived, the students entered third grade—but were now held to completely

different standards. Instead of using data from the same vendor diagnostic-that scales with our students' growth—which they still took, our now 9 year olds, had to be seated in late October at the computer for 2 sections of 90 minutes for the Ohio Third Grade ELA test. A test that is not developmentally appropriate and on which they are asked to read two multi-page reading selections and to write and type about the two selections in a multi-paragraph response about those two reading selections. This is in addition to having already read five or six selections and responded to technology-enhanced questions about those passages. They took the state test again in April.

The first hurdle our third graders and their families are concerned about is the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, also required by law. Our two students clear this hurdle easily qualifying with their MAP scores and test scores on both administrations of the state test.

But wait! Even though these readers have been on track for four years and met the threshold for promotion to the fourth grade, they are not proficient, meaning they did not have a state test score of over 700. One child scored a 696 –4 points away and one child scored a 690—ten points away. That's our 14 points folks-probably representing three questions on the test.

So those two readers do not “count” for us as on-track readers. The calculations take place in the secure data center and as expected, we believe we're going to fall into the C range for the K-3 Literacy grade in June. After subsequent calculations, our EMIS secretary calls me and tells me that we will take a two grade-letter demotion because two of our third grade off-track readers do not have Reading Improvement Plan codes reported in the system. Of course, we cannot easily determine who these students are, so after some lookup table and Excel magic, we are able to trace it back to the two students we have been discussing tonight. We have no formal written record of them being placed on a RIMP, so we move on and take the deduction and the F with explanations and apologies to our staff and board about the blight on our record due to documentation error.

Fast forward two years later and because of 14 points on a state test, you are now attempting to extort in excess of \$100,000 from our locally voted tax dollars to divert these funds to schools that are not held to ANY of the same monitoring or accountability standards I have been discussing with you---No yearly reading diagnostics...No RIMPs...No state tests...no third grade promotion score requirements. It is unconscionable that this could even be considered. You are wiping out the funding for the improvements we are making.

We serve every student that comes to us and we do it well. We don't reject students based on their disabilities, misbehaviors or their inability to pay tuition. We are required to accept students back after they have attended and failed through other private institutions only to find those students are two and three grade levels behind when they

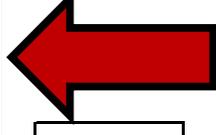
return. We serve them and we serve them well, often now at a strain to our current human and capital resources.

The next year, on our 18-19 report card, Mohawk Elementary went from an F to a C in K-3 Literacy or Improving At Risk K-3 Readers, since it has been renamed. We went from meeting 1 indicator in the Performance section in 17-18 to meeting 5 indicators. We have excellent value-added and gap-closing scores and we continually improve our performance index. Our overall school grade was a C in 17-18 and a B for 18-19. AND one of our two students I have been telling you about were proficient in ELA on the fourth grade state test—together they gained 23 points from third to fourth grade. As you can see on the spreadsheet I have printed for you, we have also outscored the state average in nearly every state tested area for the past five years. WE ARE NOT A FAILING SCHOOL.

As I explained to Rep. Riordan McClain who visited our school last week, we can compete and are willing to compete with parochials and charters if we know the rules ahead of time and are ALL held to implementing the same learning standards, testing mandates and measures of accountability. I am confident this competition wouldn't even be close. We are not a "Failing School" and our community should not continue to be penalized through a corrupted process and for what you have not been able to fix—a broken report card system, unconstitutional funding and the extreme inequity in accountability that performance-based vouchers promises to work around. I urge you to stop beating up good public schools and reverse the trend of divestiture in our public schools. We work hard to improve and prove our worth over and over again each year. For once, it is time for you to please support our efforts. Thank you for your time and consideration.

## Mohawk Elementary AIR Test Results Comparisons

Test	Grade	15-16 %	State %	Relation to State %	16-17%	State %	Relation to State %	% Passed Increase from 15/16	17-18%	State %	Relation to State %	% Passed Increase from 16/17	18-19%	State %	Relation to State %	% Passed Increase from 17/18
ELA	3	52	54	-2	64	63	1	12	63	60	3	-1	84%	66	18	21
ELA	4	46	57	-11	61	63	-2	15	67	65	2	6	66%	62	4	-1
ELA	5	64	60	4	68	67	1	4	79	70	9	11	77%	69	8	-2
ELA	6	56	54	2	65	60	5	9	72	59	13	7	51%	55	-4	-17
Math	3	79	66	13	83	70	13	4	71	66	5	-12	87%	67	20	16
Math	4	84	69	15	87	72	15	3	88	72	16	1	83%	73	10	-5
Math	5	71	62	9	78	61	17	7	72	62	10	-6	82%	61	21	10
Math	6	70	56	14	69	60	9	-1	76	58	18	7	76%	59	17	0
Science	5	71	67	4	73	68	5	2	79	68	11	6	81%	64	17	3
Social Studies	4	89	76	13	79	77	2	-10	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Social Studies	6	70	61	9	54	63	-9	-16	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA



**Analysis Summary 16-17:** We finally had two years of consistent tests to compare data and growth from year to year. Although we only reached the state's indicators of 80% proficient in 3rd and 4th grade math, we exceeded the state average scores this year in all areas but two. The other significant fact to indicate growth at our school is that we increased the percentage proficient from last year in 8 out of 11 areas.

**Analysis Summary 17-18:** One indicator reached, but our percentage of students passed was higher than **EVERY** state average. We increased our percentage passed in 6 of 9 test areas from 16-17 to 17-18. Significant progress from 5/6 team.

**Analysis Summary 18-19:** Increased from 1 indicator reached to 5! Mohawk students achieved higher scores than the state average for all but one testing area. Language arts will remain an area of focus.