

Lordstown Local Schools (Terry Armstrong, Superintendent)

Testimony as introduced Tuesday, February 18, 2020

Before the Ohio House-Senate Conference Committee

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. My name is Terry Armstrong and I currently serve as Superintendent of Lordstown Local Schools in Trumbull County (Northeast Ohio).

I am here today to testify in support of revisions outlined in Senate Bill 89 regarding Ed Choice scholarships. Lordstown Schools is a small, rural district supported by heavy and light industry. As part of the Mahoning Valley we have been negatively impacted by the demise of the steel industry as far back as the 1970's, the loss of thousands of auto parts jobs throughout the 1990's and most recently the closing of General Motors Lordstown.

On top of these economic issues, Lordstown Schools was negatively impacted by the elimination of the locally generated Tangible Personal Property taxes and the reimbursement phase out that we currently face. Locally generated TPP taxes had made up over 20 percent of district income when eliminated. Add to all of this that Lordstown Schools is a capped district, meaning that we do not receive nearly 50 percent the state funding that should be coming to us according to the current state formula. All of these things together might lead some to assume we would be a failing school district. I stand here to report that Lordstown Schools, its students, families and community are just the opposite.

Despite these funding challenges Lordstown Schools offers a growing arts program; a new, grant funded Global Logistics program; a K-12 STEM program; a successful Power of the Pen and Mock Trial program; the highest number of athletic opportunities than any other small districts in our area, and through the hard work of our teachers we offer thirty-six hours of College Credit Plus undergraduate coursework right on our campus, taught by our teachers. These are just some examples of successes at Lordstown Schools.

While we agree that the current school report card and assessments need study and revisions, Lordstown Elementary School's overall grade was a B and Lordstown High School had an overall grade of C. As Superintendent, and knowing the quality of our students, our dedicated staff, and our supportive community, not only would I personally and professionally give the district overall an A, I would challenge a system that places schools on lists of failing schools that are not receiving overall failing grades.

The current Ohio Ed Choice manner of funding also is inherently unfair to public school districts and local taxpayers. This year, Lordstown Schools will receive a total of \$1,142,552.96 in state foundation funding. That amount is to fund 450 of our Lordstown

student population. This results in the State of Ohio providing just a little over \$2,500.00 per student. Despite this, the current funding provision regarding Ed Choice deducts \$6,000.00 for students in grades 9-12 and \$4,650.00 for students in K-8 directly from public schools. This current system is fundamentally unfair to not only our schools but local taxpayers as they must make up the difference! The implementation of an expanded EdChoice voucher system is coming at enormous cost to local taxpayers throughout Ohio.

Professionally I speak in support of SB 89 as I do personally as well. I stand here today thirty years removed from graduating from a public school. Despite it being thirty years ago, I have a story similar to that of many in public school students today. My mother was fourteen years old when I was born. This brought many challenges to us as a family throughout my childhood, what we commonly now know as Adverse Childhood Experiences. One constant I had was my public school teachers. When I look back on my life it was those teachers, counselors and support staff that made all the difference for me and broke down barriers in my life. Today I see public school teachers in Lordstown and throughout the Mahoning Valley making a difference for students every day!

Continuing to go down a road of taking money from public schools at the expense of our students and local taxpayers further erodes the ability to meet growing needs of 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 and I urge you to adopt amendments outlined in SB 89. I am happy to address your questions.