

EdChoice Conference Committee

February 19, 2020

Chris Williams – 2nd Grade Teacher at Colerain Elementary in Columbus City Schools  
Ed Choice Testimony

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

I work in a small, diverse public school in Columbus Ohio. Around half of our students have significant orthopedic impairments and are medically fragile students. In many of their individualized education plans (IEPs), we indicate they are fully dependent on adults for all of their daily needs. Many of our students, especially the most vulnerable, are fully dependent on adults on another level: to make important decisions that affect their daily lives, decisions that affect public education. These decisions include many things: what they'll have for lunch, how much money and resources that will be invested into their schools they attend and love. This reality provides us a lofty task- to ensure we're doing right by them, we're equipping them to be lifelong learners and productive citizens, these young people who depend on us.

My school is as diverse as one could be, and it is an exceptional place to work for that reason and many others. It has been described by students and staff in these ways:

"It's like Disney Land; everyone is smiling all the time."

"Colerain is one of my happy places. Seeing the students every morning brings joy to my heart and soul. Every day I see love displayed by the staff for one another AND for the students."

"The children at Colerain are very inspiring! We learn as much from them as they learn from us. They always bring a smile to our faces!"

"My school is one of the best, "You just had to be there" stories being told in Columbus. It is all hands on deck, every day, for every child. I love collaborating with the general ed. teachers and other colleagues to serve our students each day. It is a truly special place."

I wonder, though, what our students think, and what our families think, when they see us receive a C, D, or F each year on our state report card. We work each year, each day, to gain the trust of our students and their families. They trust us to make strides and educate them adequately, and we do. According to individual measures, such as Student Learning Objectives, standardized tests, and IEP goals, our students make adequate progress each year. Yet, due to the state-mandated testing of our students with profound disabilities, we receive an F each year overall on the State Report Card. We show up as one of those schools, a "failing school." But we know that's not the case. In the words of a favorite artist of mine, Jason Petty, "Maybe it's time we test the test!"

Maybe if we test the test, we will see that the systems in place don't tell the true story of our schools, like mine. They don't show the public the whole picture. Our students, and our communities, are depending on us adults to make the right choices, to tell the correct narratives of our schools and of our

students. The current EdChoice program of performance -based school vouchers further stifle our ability to give the public what they deserve- an accurate narrative, the true story, of how our public schools are performing.

The reality is, some of these failing schools, aren't failing. Not at all. WE, the adults they depend on, are failing. We're failing our students, their families, and our communities because under the current system we are using "choice" at the expense of other students.

Shame on us, for continuing to rely on methods of assessment and measurement that, at best, paint a limited picture of what our students can do, and what they deserve in their schools.

The state report card from my school does not accurately share the narrative of my students and it is being used as an excuse to take needed funds away from Columbus City Schools. Public schools deserve adequate funding to ensure the utmost success for those who fill their classrooms each day.

With all this in mind, I urge this committee to move away from performance-based eligibility for vouchers. I urge you to move away from paying for some students' private school tuition by deducting that money from state funding to my district and other districts across Ohio. Of the plans considered by the legislature I greatly prefer SB 89 as passed by the House. I implore you to think of my students and other students in public schools across the state. If you have to keep vouchers in place at least stop doing on the backs of my students.

Thank you.