

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 Doug Baker, superintendent of Zanesville City Schools located in Muskingum County, Ohio. In addition, I have been on the adjunct teaching staff at Kent State University for over 20 years; and, I am a scorer and question writer for the Educational Testing Service (ETS) that provides a national assessment to prospective principals and superintendents. I am here today to encourage the committee to adopt the meaningful voucher reforms as passed by the Ohio House.

I am a proud product of the Ohio Public Education System having graduated from Bridgeport Exempted School District located in Belmont County, Ohio; and, having earned my undergraduate degree from Miami University located in Oxford, Ohio. My three children, Zachary an engineer; Caleb a hospital medical lab director; and, Sarah a human resource specialist are also proud products of the Ohio Public Education System and Ohio Public University System. I am convinced that the public education system in Ohio is the "great equalizer" for our state that advances the economic realities for individuals and families regardless of the professional and/or vocational pathway that is selected.

Zanesville City Schools is a "capped" school district under the state funding formula which means that Zanesville City Schools receives "less" funding than it should receive from the state to serve the students of Zanesville. I believe the primary objective of the legislative body is to fully fund the public schools under the charge of the state as a first priority.

Current choices for Ohio school children include: Home Schooling, College Credit Plus, Dual Enrollment, Open Enrollment, Public Community Schools, Private Community Schools, Online Charter Schools and Career - Technical Schools. Each of these "choices" (with the exception of Home Schooling) requires Zanesville City Schools to transfer both state dollars and local dollars to those organizations. Even though Zanesville City Schools is "underfunded" by the state, Zanesville City Schools does not have the option to "under fund" those other organizations if our students choose to receive their education in that format; rather, Zanesville City Schools is required to transfer the full amount of the required cost. I am disheartened that the EdChoice Voucher Program has the potential to further erode the public funds that should be utilized in Zanesville City Schools. I also believe there will be additional "unintended" consequences not yet realized.

If the EdChoice Voucher legislation is not changed, I would anticipate students and families exercising yet another option that diverts both state and local funding from the public school to other private institutions. Please consider the following: if I have a classroom of 26 students in it or a classroom of 15 students--the cost of that classroom is the same. If I have a school bus with 45 students on it or a school bus with 20 students--the cost of that bus route is the same. The EdChoice Voucher Program will reduce funding to the district; however, that does not necessarily result in a reduction in expenses for the public school district. Please also consider that the Zanesville City Schools already provides services to private schools such as transportation, tutoring, special education services, fiscal oversight, securing of grant funds, and consultation. It is also noteworthy to understand that Zanesville City Schools has offered the local parochial school students the opportunity to attend classes at Zanesville High School, at no cost, in such nationally renowned programming as: Project Lead the Way Engineering, Project Lead the Way Bio-Medical Science, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC), Advanced Placement courses and

summer school programming as a means to build relationships and enhance the success of all students. Collaboration and the sharing of resources may be a better solution in some communities as opposed to a “broad brush” approach that yet again results in “winners” and “losers.”

I believe it is wrong to assume the word "private" in front of an institution means that it is automatically better than "public." As just one example, Zanesville City Schools has robotics teams at the elementary school level, middle school level, and high school level that routinely compete at the national and world competitions--there is no better indication of excellence provided by public education. However, these types of accolades are not reflected within the currently flawed report card reporting methodology—which I humbly suggest should be the second primary objective of the legislative body following funding in regard to public education.

One of my favorite baseball players, and yes, philosopher, Yogi Berra is quoted as saying, “You can observe a lot by just watching,” and he is correct. Over my 37 years in public service, I have observed the social, emotional, and economic needs of children increase immensely due to a variety of reasons and realities. While during this same time, I have observed the academic expectations for students, in both depth and breadth of content understanding, increase remarkably as well to meet the ever changing needs in our world. Some would classify this as the “perfect storm;” however, the educators and support personnel at Zanesville City Schools have identified this situation as both a challenge and an opportunity. It is also my observation that some things have not changed over those 37 years. Educators at Zanesville City Schools routinely come in early, stay late, utilize personal funds, extend themselves to provide emotional support, provide guidance—even following the student’s graduation, and volunteer time in our community to benefit their students or as affectionately referenced as by the staff as “our kids.”

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.