

My name is Gretchen Tash. I am a teacher with 35 years of experience in public schools. I have dedicated my entire adult life to the premise that public education is essential to the betterment of society. I am writing today to state why I am for SB 89 as passed by the House of Representatives. Under HB89, New performance-based vouchers would largely cease to be awarded except for siblings of some current recipients. Instead, new vouchers would be based on family-income (up to 250% of poverty). This is a state-paid program rather than being funded through robbing local school districts of local taxes.

There are certain provisions of the common good that are so essential to a just and stable society that the public ensures they are extended to all people. Fire and police protection, safe roads and clean water are such provisions. Everyone receives these services regardless of condition, and the public authorities work hard to provide them equally to all citizens.

Education is such a public provision. It is vital to the mutual interest and well-being of all people that everyone receives a quality education. Therefore, the public pays for that education through tax dollars. It is wrong of you to then divert those tax dollars-- dollars, properly invested in the publicly owned institutions called public schools, tax dollars you now propose to use to underwrite and subsidize the private schools through voucher programs and policies.

The expansion of vouchers has resulted in higher deductions from state payments to school districts. This puts increased pressure on local taxpayers and it jeopardises programs that serve public school students: programs essential to meeting the legislative mandates of the flawed public school report card system. The number of school buildings deemed voucher-eligible has ballooned in the past year. At the risk of being redundant, this is because eligibility is based on Ohio's broken report card system. The sad irony of this whole policy is that private schools that take vouchers don't have any report cards at all. Parents don't get an apples-to-apples comparison. In fact, a study of Ohio's EdChoice program found that participants fared worse on state tests compared to their closely matched peers remaining in public schools.

Will private schools be held to the same academic standards as public schools as a result of accepting vouchers? Will they educate students of all abilities, socio-economic backgrounds? At least the House plan would rank-order applicants based on income, so lower income families would get priority in cases where appropriations aren't sufficient to fund all qualifying applications.

Student achievement ought to be the driving force behind any education reform initiative. There is no evidence that Ohio's existing voucher programs have improved student performance. Ohio's voucher programs drain needed resources from the approximately 90% of students who attend Ohio's local public schools.

Even those who support vouchers should be able to agree that providing “choice” to some students shouldn’t come at the expense of other students. Unfortunately, due to how EdChoice vouchers are funded, the opposite is true. What happens to students who fail to meet the private school standard mid-year? Obviously they will return to the public school--but what about the tax dollars enjoyed by the private institution? There are so many unanswered questions posed by this legislation. There is one surety, however, public schools will continue to educate students of all religions, races, ethnicities, sexual orientation, abilities and disabilities within a flawed report card system and despite an unconstitutional funding system.

On behalf of the 600-plus Ohio public school districts, their educators, students, families, and communities, I’m asking you to reconsider Ed Choice at best; at the least, rally support for SB 89.