

Dear Chairman Jones and Members of the Committee:

My mother was a high school English teacher, my father was a 6-12th grade Music teacher, and my aunts and uncles and cousins are teachers in various states and kinds of school systems. I ended up a teacher, too, and sometimes I wonder if there's credence to the idea of a profession being "in your blood." Of all of the teachers that I know, a common idea is passion, passion for their students, passion for their subject matter, passion for the act of teaching and sharing ideas. All of the teachers I've mentioned are public school teachers. I am a parent, too, and I vote in favor of any school levy that comes my way because education and healthcare are the most important things a just society can guarantee its citizens.

My children attend public school, and this has been a conscious choice on my part. I was tempted to put them in a private Montessori school when my oldest reached school-age, but I chose public school. I wanted them to experience diverse classrooms, local friends, and a chance at a number of programs private schools couldn't offer, not the least of which was an amazing music and performing arts curriculum. My oldest daughter is sixteen and is a junior in high school at Gahanna. I can't figure out for the life of me why someone would reasonably choose not to send their kid to Gahanna schools. My daughter can (and has) audition for two jazz bands, three symphonic bands, three orchestras, and she can also participate in marching band and a nationally recognized theater program. She was able to travel to New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz, with her jazz band. She was able to travel to New York City with the marching band. She is also interested in filmmaking, and just found out that next year she can take a course dedicated to documentary film production and two more broadcast journalism classes. She took a photography class last semester that gave her joy every day, and she's finally managed to learn how to like an English class thanks to several semesters of honors English with amazing teachers. Last summer, she went to China as the penultimate experience following nine years in a grant-funded Chinese language program. She could have taken AP Chinese had she chosen to do so. Gahanna's course catalogue is an inch thick, and I doubt very much a kid could find that many things to choose from at a private school. This diverse catalogue allows more kids to take classes that energize them and make them value their education.

When vouchers can pull as much as six thousand dollars from a public school system that may sound like choice, but only families who can make up the difference in private tuition or can transport their children to private schools can actually choose to take the vouchers. I choose to keep my kids in public school and do my best to help those schools with solid parental involvement and voting in favor of anything that will add to the public schools, not something that can take resources away from them.

My youngest is in seventh grade at Gahanna Middle School West, and has already managed amazing experiences there. She is an at-risk LGBTQ kid who has found an after-school support program for kids like her and it has helped her navigate the difficult waters of middle school thanks to the amazing teachers and staff who lead that group. She has joined a jazz band that is extracurricular, led by the middle school band director who wants to give these younger kids exposure to this very important kind of music. She is in the Chinese program as well, hoping to learn as much as she can and experience the China trip that her sister was able to experience. She was able to get into an advanced Language Arts class because she loves writing with all of her heart, and has been able to do things like produce her own graphic novel thanks to that caring teacher who is encouraging her. She has gone in and helped teachers after school simply because she misses them and wants to help them because they helped her.

Both of my children have had amazing, diverse experiences in our public schools. I grew up in public school with public schoolteacher parents, and I have watched the Ohio public schools manage to be great places despite the challenges of an unconstitutionally funded system. Taking anything away from these schools will only diminish them, and will only diminish the experiences available to our kids. To fix a place you don't leave the place; you stay and help it grow. The public school experience my family has had has been outstanding. Anything that could hurt this can't be right, and you should find a different way of funding the EdChoice program.

Thank you for your time, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have. Joan Petrusky