

Chairman Jones, honored committee members, thank you for allowing me to testify.

My name is Jocelyn Spencer Rhynard, I am the Vice President of the Dayton City Schools Board of Education, and a mother of four children in public school. I come before you today not with criticisms but with observations and solutions.

If it pleases the committee, I would like to speak to the issues of EdChoice vouchers and the state report card.

We are all here because we believe in education.

We believe in education for ourselves and for our children, because it is the cornerstone of our modern society. Education makes us smarter and stronger, it reduces poverty and improves health, fosters peace and increases gender equality. 9 out of 10 children in this country attend public schools.

Education, *public* education, makes Ohio stronger and healthier and more equitable.

Dayton is a city with a poverty rate of 36%. It has 23,000 school-age children, but only 13,000 of them attend Dayton Public Schools. DPS has more than 2,000 children with disabilities and ranks near the bottom of the Ohio state report card rankings.

What do parents overwhelmingly say they're looking for when they move to a new city? They're looking for a place to live with "good schools". My husband and I used to be those people! We moved to Dayton with a baby in 2003 and swore we would never send our kids to DPS because they were failing and nobody would voluntarily send their kids there. When it was time for our oldest to attend kindergarten, we weren't ready to sell our house and decided to look into all of our options, whether they be charter, private, or homeschooling. I was urged to check out Franklin Montessori, which is now River's Edge Montessori, a *public* Montessori elementary school. I admit I went in with the expectation that there was no way I'd be impressed. Instead, I saw a school that truly nurtures and loves and follows the child, that allows children to explore the world around them and learn naturally, by themselves or with their peers. It was like nothing I had ever seen before and came home and declared to my husband that all of our kids were going to Dayton Public Schools. All our kids still attend DPS, get high standardized test scores, are surrounded by people of different races, classes and cultures, and I know that they are getting a high-quality education.

My husband and I learned that the terms "good schools" and "bad schools" are code words. They are code words for poverty levels and racial segregation.

How can we possibly compare to wealthy suburbs when we are a district that is in the fourth largest food desert in the country, has housing insecurity, and has such high poverty that every child in our schools receives free and reduced lunch? This is what the flawed report card truly reflects in Ohio: communities that lack resources and have barriers that prevent children from

accessing high-quality education. For many of our students, the only meals they eat are the two we feed them at school, the water isn't running at home, or parents are working three jobs just to keep the electricity bill paid.

EdChoice has further decimated public education in Ohio and cities like Dayton. Dayton Public lost \$57 million dollars over the last 4 years to EdChoice vouchers. EdChoice takes public tax dollars and diverts it to charter and religious schools that are not held to the same rules and regulations set forth in Ohio law. Schools that accept the EdChoice vouchers can and do turn away students with disabilities or low test scores, and can expel students for individual low grades.

The school choice promised under EdChoice is a scam: it is private and charter schools that really get to choose; they choose which of our kids to accept and educate. I urge you to ask a parent of a special needs student how many choices *their* kids have with a voucher.

It's not real choice when schools that accept vouchers have selective admissions based on disabilities or grades.

It's not real choice when they kick out students that are underperforming.

It's not real choice when charter and private schools are not held to the same rules, regulations, and auditing standards as public schools and are allowed to operate with no real transparency.

This is not what it means to be committed to education. This is like putting public schools in the same foot race as charter and private schools, but our feet are tied together and when we lose we are blamed for our performance.

In our public school district, we *have* choices. Our parents can choose which school their children attend, and can choose options like a Montessori elementary school, an elementary school with a newly opened school-based health care clinic, one of two CTE high schools, an arts magnet high school, an early college academy high school, or a STEM high school. We have choice in DPS!

In fact, a national study released earlier this month found that 73% of voters agree that we should NOT take away public funds from our public schools to fund private, religious, and home school education and that 64% of voters are much less likely to vote for an elected official who supports taking away funds from public schools to give to private schools. I would be happy to share that study with the committee.

I support [Senate Bill \(SB\) 89](#), as passed by the House. While the bill does not address all concerns, it does phase out the building performance-based voucher program over time. It is the best solution for all districts proposed by the legislature thus far.

We are all here in this room today because we believe in the power of education and we are invested in the quality of education for Ohio students. We are all fighting to give children access to a high-quality education that will improve the lives of our families, our communities, and the state of Ohio. If we truly want to improve education in Ohio, the single best thing we can do is support and improve *public* education.

The data comes from a poll, “America Speaks on Public Schools: Results from the 2020 NSBAC Public Education Poll,” conducted by the [National School Boards Action Center](#). The results of the poll were released on February 3, 2020.