

## Ed Choice Speech

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Good evening legislatures. Thank you for allowing me to come speak before you about educational choice. My name is Jodie Banaszak & I live in Toledo. My husband & I have been married 21 years, & we have four children ranging in ages from eight to 17. Two of my children are here with me. Cassidy is 17 & is a Junior at Central Catholic High School. Her brother, Nick, is 13 & is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Elmhurst Elementary & will be a Freshman at Central Catholic this fall. Together, we have four children in three different schools. Yes, I'm busy driving my mom mobile to & from three schools daily!

Perhaps you're wondering why we've chosen to send our children to so many different schools. No, it's definitely not convenient, but our reason illustrates my necessity for speaking before you, beautifully. Children need to go to school where their needs are met, & for us currently, that means one private high school & two public elementary schools. None of these buildings are our school of residence within Toledo Public.

Ed Choice was created in 2005 to provide families living in school boundaries with failing buildings the opportunity for school choice. The expansion in 2013 opened up additional

opportunities for families to opt for school choice by meeting certain income thresholds, & for about 14 years or so, little fuss was made about Ed Choice because it predominately affected urban districts. That ended when the law was reinterpreted & the designated list of schools increased dramatically in July, 2019. Suddenly districts like Washington Local, Sylvania, and Anthony Wayne found some of their buildings on the list, & here we are trying to come to an equitable resolution.

There are some key points I'd like to make. Striking Ed Choice & replacing it with an income-based scholarship may sound good on the surface, however please consider the following.

1. Currently, there ARE failing schools in Ohio, perhaps not every building that recently landed on the designated list, but to believe otherwise is short sighted.
2. Ohio has a decision to make in regard to education, & it appears a choice has to be made. I ask you to consider who will ultimately take highest priority, students or public districts? If we prioritize students first, the job before you becomes simpler. Students like Cassidy have finally received benefit from Ed Choice. This is the first academic year she has qualified for the scholarship, though she has never attended a public school. If Cassidy is a priority to Ohio, why would she have to attend a school that doesn't meet her needs for a semester in order to receive Ed Choice? Cassidy is an excellent student & athlete, has a 3.60 cum GPA, loves STEM & Science, has taken several honors classes, is set to take the ACT in March & June, & has started campus tours for college. Until January 31<sup>st</sup> of this year, Nick qualified for Ed Choice for Freshman year. He is also an excellent student, involved in sports, Boy Scouts, & enjoys serving others with his gifts.

3. Parents are the primary educators of their children. When parents partner with schools, public or private, to share the responsibility of educating a child, is that not a choice in itself? Is this discussion really about limiting a parent's choice in how or where to educate our children to prioritize public district funding over a student's best chance at success?
4. Our family is the typical blue collar, middle class family. My husband & I have yet to gross \$100,000 in a year. We certainly aren't dangling on the poverty line for a family of six, but we struggle like most regular Americans do. My children have everything they need & a little of what they want. My husband & I have sacrificed, done without, & put off home repairs to pay private school tuition since Cassidy was in PreK. I clip coupons, shop the thrift stores, mend instead of replace, wear Cassidy's stylish hand me downs, & have become very good at saying no. We don't qualify for any type of break or assistance, as most middle-class families know too well. And, this brings up a good point.
5. Central Catholic's tuition is about \$10,000 a year, per pupil. Taking the scholarship prior to January 31<sup>st</sup>, a family such as mine still pays the difference in tuition & other fees, buys uniforms that can only be purchased at school, provides transportation, & there is no federally funded free/reduced school breakfast & lunch program. Thinking back to the good feeling of extending an income-based scholarship to lower-income families, have you considered the additional costs involved beyond a \$6000 scholarship? Is educational choice now going to be based on income only? If so, who is served with that decision, public districts or students?

6. It seems to me we could replace the words “Ed Choice” in this discussion with charter schools, the Jon Peterson Scholarship, or the Autism Scholarship because all divert money away from public districts. In fact, 20 years ago, Ohio was having a very similar conversation about charter schools draining funds from public districts, yet they remain an educational choice today.

The question becomes where do we go from here? First, we have to admit the school report card scoring system used to “grade” our public districts isn’t working. That is what the real problem before us is & you likely aren’t going to solve that problem by April 1<sup>st</sup>. I humbly request you take the steps necessary to correct the formula used for grading our schools & while this assembly works that through, continue to award Ed Choice Scholarships to students currently receiving them & “grandfather” in students like Nick who were ready to turn in their scholarship applications & supporting documents until the House voted to delay the application window until April 1<sup>st</sup>. If you solve the root of the problem, the state report cards, students will be Ohio’s priority & not just the victims of failed policy & well intentioned, but poorly executed educational law. The quality of a child’s education should not be dictated by their zip code. Finally, I will conclude with a quote from John F. Kennedy. “Conformity is the jailer of freedom & the enemy of growth”.