



# Brooklyn City Schools

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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 Dr. Mark Gleichauf, superintendent of Brooklyn City Schools.

I am here to testify this evening to share testimony about the EdChoice Voucher program. As it currently constructed, the EdChoice program creates some fundamental fairness problems for Districts like mine. I want to share those inequities and I offer suggestions on how to craft legislation that develops a much more even playing field and provide true choice opportunities for the students and families of Ohio.

For those of who do not know, Brooklyn is a small, district of nearly 1400 students that borders the southwest side of Cleveland Metropolitan School District and borders Parma City to the south. My District is NOT currently on the EdChoice designated lists for performance-based scholarships. Although with the growing number in the last year, I fear we will be on the list in coming years despite our best efforts.

Let me first say to the committee, that I or my District, do not spite a parent's choice and have no problem with educational competition. I invite it, quite frankly, as I know the high quality Brooklyn City Schools education we provide compares favorably with options our families have in our densely populated area.

Let me elaborate on some of the current challenges we and other districts face in the currently constructed EdChoice system.

Issue #1 is the direct deduction from our state foundation funding. IF Brooklyn were to offer EdChoice scholarships to its families it would be a severe cut disproportional to the amount of money the District receives from the state of Ohio. In fiscal year 2020, Brooklyn City Schools receives \$898 per pupil in state funding. If this figure seems low to you, it does because it is very low. In fact, Brooklyn is one of approximately 25 districts that receives less state aid than non-publics and parochial currently receive for auxiliary services. We are a capped District and thus we are already on an uneven playing field with our parochial and private school neighbors. If a Brooklyn student were to use a scholarship an amount nearly 4X our state aid amount would be sent that school. The good people of Brooklyn have been generous with their means the last few years at the polls. They have passed two renewals and one new money tax issue. The Brooklyn community passed those to support our public schools not parochial and privates. In fact in the 2019 Cupp Report Brooklyn has a tax effort index of over 1.0 which is the state average. That shows the incredible support our public schools have in spite of our community's relative means.

Issue #2 is that a performance-based voucher system is based on a flawed report card and accountability system. How do you explain the list of schools whose students are eligible for vouchers on their schools' performance growing from nearly 500 to more than 1200 in just one year? Even you as the General Assembly realize that and know that a fix to this is necessary.

Issue #3 is a very Brooklyn or First Ring suburban issue. My District's proximity to private and parochial schools, who could receive these vouchers, is exponentially higher than most other districts in the state.

Brooklyn has at least 10 private high schools within a 15 minute drive of its borders. Additionally, that numbers balloons to over 50 private elementary schools that could receive my taxpayers hard-earned dollars that they have voted for to our District. Some might just tell us, "Well that's life in the big city." But the fact is my families have many more realistic and viable options than parents in rural parts of the Ohio. Hence, my exposure to lose valuable public school dollars is much greater.

Issue #4 is around the expansion income-based opportunity vouchers that has begun. As my staff and I have worked hard to stay out of the performance-based scholarships, the expansion income-based scholarship is a direct hit. The current model bases income-based eligibility on 200%, but there is talk of raising that to 250% or even 300% of the poverty level. For your understanding, 300% represents \$77,000 for a family of four. The average income in my District is \$33,800 per the FY19 Cupp Report, so this eligibility level could include a large percentage of my families. Couple that with the extensive number of options my families have in my area and this could have catastrophic ramifications for the public schools in Brooklyn.

Last week, Dr. Frank O'Linn testified for the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland about vouchers and their potential impact on Catholic education. He stated that he believed Catholic education will go on whatever the policy. I am not as convinced with the future of public education if these policies get expanded at the rate we have seen in the last couple years.

Issue #5 is the fact that private and parochial schools who will receive these opportunity vouchers do not have the same accountability measures as my District. Let me reiterate that I am not opposed to accountability. I embrace it because I believe in the work we are doing for the students of Brooklyn. But let me also be clear on this point, in the current system proposed ...

- I receive less money per pupil already in state aid than the non-public and private schools
- I will lose 4 times the amount of my per pupil state aid, IF a student chooses to use an opportunity voucher, and
- My students will need to take end of year tests whose results will be posted on the front of the Plain Dealer while the school receiving these vouchers will not have to even give the test.

I was the former varsity volleyball coach in Brooklyn many years ago and I share this analogy to the EdChoice issue.

The private schools and Brooklyn Schools are both volleyball teams preparing for competition. The private school has been given 8 volleyballs to use while Brooklyn has just 4 volleyballs.

If one of my players wants to leave and play on the private school team, he/she takes a volleyball with them. I don't get an extra despite their leaving.

Now that player who is new to the private school could be "kicked off " that team, the private school team gets to keep the volleyball they received.

The Brooklyn public school team, despite the equipment and personnel challenges, will play a rigorous schedule and will have that record compared to everyone else's at the end of the year. In addition, my team may be shamed for this record, despite the lack of equipment as no one will know those challenges.

The private school team may not even compete at all despite the equipment and resources provided.

In summation, I ask you to consider supporting House version of Senate Bill 89. While the bill does not address all of our concerns and has room for improvement, it is the best solution thus far. My suggested improvements to the legislation are as follows:

1. Set the eligibility level at 200% of the federal poverty level
2. Provide funding to offset losses due to exponential voucher growth

3. Establish meaningful and equitable accountability measures for private schools that accept vouchers

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.