

Dear Chairman Jones, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Marla Becker, and I appear here as a firm proponent of a strong public school system.

My three sons have attended Gahanna-Jefferson schools; two graduated in 2016 and 2018, the youngest will graduate in 2022.

All of them have been heavily involved in music programs while in school; my eldest was in choir and in theatre, and traveled to London and Scotland with the theatre department his freshman year to perform at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. When a friend's tragedy changed his perspective and motivation toward school his sophomore year, it was the music programs that kept him engaged, and he even had the opportunity to take an Honors Harmony and Theory course that enabled him to pass an AP Theory exam and gain college credit.

His younger brothers have been involved with the school Orchestra program, and have traveled to perform at Disney World in 2017 and will travel to perform in New York City later this spring.

All three of them were identified as gifted while in elementary school, and received services such as pull-out classes or differentiated instruction in the lower grades, and the opportunity to take Honors or AP classes in high school. My middle son graduated with 9 hours of college credit, thanks to AP courses, and based on my younger son's plan toward graduation, there's a chance he will end up with as many as 21 hours of AP credit.

In addition to being identified as gifted, my sons have also required accommodations under a 504 plan. My middle son, in particular, was having trouble academically despite the fact that, as his teachers told me, he was more than intellectually capable. Between the school guidance counselor, the school psychologist, and outside assessments, we had team put together a 504 plan that made all the difference. We joke that his first language is math, and his math grade went from a C- to a high A after the 504 was in place. The school guidance counselor also helped us navigate the documentation required to permit accommodations for the ACT test, his composite score went from low twenties to a 32. He's now a math major in college and advocates for himself with the disability office on campus.

We are fortunate to live in a town that has a very strong school system that offers such amazing opportunities as well as the depth of resources to help students who may be struggling. But it's not luck that we live where we do, and that our children attend Gahanna schools. My husband and I are both college graduates with good jobs. We are both involved parents because we have the time and resources to be so, and we were taught how to be so by the example of our own parents. It's our children who are lucky; they just happened to be born to us instead of to someone else.

Not all children are as lucky as ours. Children don't get to choose who they're born to, where they're born, their zip code of residence, or the other circumstances of their lives. They don't get to choose whether their parents are involved and positive role models. But ALL children deserve a quality education through the public school system. A quality public education should be the great equalizer.

Reflecting on my kids' experiences, ALL children deserve arts classes to keep them engaged if that's what they need, ALL children deserve gifted education if that's what they need, ALL children deserve

full-time guidance counselors and school psychologists if that's what they need. All school districts should have the funding to provide all of these services, and more.

Public school districts should have the resources they need to be able to provide a quality education for all children. Crippling districts by taking away funding every time a student takes a voucher to attend a private school is not the solution to creating better public education for all.

Please do not further harm struggling school districts with funding Ed Choice vouchers by taking money away from the local districts. Please fund Ed Choice vouchers through a separate State scholarship fund.

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.