

HB9 Witness Testimony

February 19, 2020

Mike Holbrook - Superintendent of Hamilton City Schools

Members of the Conference Committee, I thank each of you for your service and the opportunity to speak tonight on behalf of the Hamilton City School District community.

My name is Mike Holbrook and I have the pleasure of serving as Superintendent of Hamilton City Schools in Butler County.

Hamilton City Schools is an urban school district located in Hamilton, Ohio. We are the 18th largest district in the state of Ohio with nearly 9,500 students, 8 elementary buildings, 2 middle schools, 1 freshman building, 1 high school, and an alternative service school.

The district has a nearly 70% free and reduced lunch population. Our student population is diverse with nearly 800 ELL students and approximately 1,800 special education students.

In recent years, the district has partnered with local and regional organizations to open a community health center that is attached to Garfield Middle School. The health clinic is used to provide needed services to our students and community.

In addition, we provide mental health services for students in all buildings, with several buildings also housing partial hospitalization units.

The district offers at no cost all day preschool programming and starting in the 2020-21 school year will offer free lunch to all students.

Although we have challenges, Hamilton City Schools is thriving. Annually we have students that are accepted into Ivy League Schools such as Yale, and Columbia, and just last week a student was accepted into West Point.

The district has recently partnered with Butler Tech and students have numerous career opportunities that did not exist in the past.

Yet, Hamilton High School is labeled as a failing school due to a flawed state report card metric on the calculation of graduation rate.

The district has a fine arts program that is thriving. Several years ago, our marching band was selected to perform at the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, and we have two schools that were just recently recognized by the State of Ohio Department of Education with the Momentum Award – honoring student growth.

Hamilton City Schools supports Senate Bill 89 as a first step in school reform in Ohio as it represents a fundamental shift in our voucher system, from a failing school approach that uses flawed data from the State Report Card to an income-based approach.

Senate Bill 89 will end policy that forces public school districts and taxpayers from paying for private school tuition.

A recent poll conducted by the National School Boards Action Center found that 73% of voters oppose public funding being used for private school education.

Currently, nearly one billion dollars is allocated annually in Ohio for Community/Charter Schools and EdChoice Vouchers.

This is money and resources that never make it into our public-school classrooms.

Although SB 89 is the first step, any final legislation should include:

- A plan that ends the failed school model, (based on a flawed report card system) for vouchers and:
 - Moves to an income-based approach that prioritizes low-income kids, with the neediest kids getting top priority.

This was the original intent of School Choice in Ohio.

The current state of Ohio report card data has produced an unfair, biased, and inaccurate accountability system. It has labeled communities, districts, and schools as failing - AND nothing could be further from the truth.

- A plan that is a direct funding model from the State that DOES NOT reduce dollars allocated to public schools.

If the legislature determines that vouchers are good public policy, although 73% of the population disagrees, then we would simply ask the legislature to pay for them and end the shell game being played with locally voted property tax dollars and/or state dollars.

Community members who supported local tax levies were not told their property taxes would be used to subsidize private school tuition.

- A plan that requires all schools that accept school vouchers:
 - Same accountability standards as public schools
 - Enrollment policies that do not discriminate against any student who applies using a voucher.

A significant question is “When does a private school cease to function as private and become public.”

- A plan that moves Ohio closer to real reform regarding state testing and completely revamps a flawed report card system - both of which are ineffective and at the heart of this issue.

Public schools throughout Ohio face many significant challenges and reducing school funding in districts that are addressing those challenges is a giant step backwards.

A complete overhaul of the state report card system cannot be lost in this discussion as it is the current trigger in improperly labeling communities, districts, buildings, and students as ‘Failing.’

We appreciate the time, effort, and concern on this important issue and hope the resolution is one that is best for all students throughout the state of Ohio.

Thank you for your time today and I entertain any questions from the committee at this time.