

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. Mimi R. Webb, superintendent of St. Bernard-Elmwood Place City Schools.

Ed Choice is impacting my district, St. Bernard-Elmwood City Schools, in a very dramatic way. Currently, we are supporting, i.e., paying for 72 students. Within this number are thirty-six students who attend various local private high schools. Not one of these students ever attended our high school. The cost for the Ed Choice, high school students, is \$216, 000 for this year alone. We have an additional 36 students who are k-8. Since most of these students never attended our school, we never received any money from the State to pay for these students. Current taxpayers will pay the cost. We receive \$3,478 for each student k-12 from the State, but we pay \$4350 for elementary students and \$6000 for high school students. Why are private schools given more from the State than we are? This means we are paying out more than local students. There is a more significant allocation leaving the district than what could be received. The total cost to educate a student in my district is \$9,641.

One of the concerning issues regarding these students is that they can be dismissed from the private school at any time. One of the justifications for Ed Choice being for multiple years is the sustainability of long-lasting friendships and the sense of doing right for the student. And yet, consistently, I am confronted with situations where students have been removed from the nonpublic setting for not measuring up to the private school's expectations. The most recent student to arrive at the district was

on 2-6-2020. This young man, who is a senior, was enrolled in the district from K to 5th grade. He then enrolled in a private school for 6th grade midway through the 12th. He is approximately 16 weeks from graduation. When his mother came to enroll him, she did not bring a transcript because she still owes tuition money over and above his Ed Choice dollars. The lack of paperwork makes it difficult to place the student in classes, as we are unsure of what he has taken, passed, or the grade received. Both the mother and student were unaware if he had taken the required AIR tests or of the possible points received, thus requiring that we find an alternative pathway to graduation.

One of the alternative pathways is via a Capstone project. Our students who utilized this pathway have been actively working on their projects since August of 2019 or the beginning of the school year. This means that this student will try to compact this project into about 12 weeks, which will impact both the quality and growth experience for the student. This is unfair to both the student and the other students who have been actively working on the project for six months. If need be, we will also look at the use of 'seals' to help this student graduate. Another unintended consequence, for both the student and us, is if he does not have all the required classes or does not find another pathway, he will be considered a dropout. This could impact the graduation rate, which was the primary reason we became involved with Ed Choice.

I wish this were the only example of issues with students being dismissed from private schools, but it is not. Earlier this year, a mother and her child appeared at our admission desk, telling us that the student had been dismissed because he was 'bad.' The child said to us the school told him that they did not have to 'deal' with his behavior, but we did. The mother then shared that it was suggested to her that she get 'a behavior plan to deal with her child.' We have never had this student enrolled, but we acknowledge, as a public entity, our duty to warmly embrace all students. While I cannot state that they were accurate in their statements, it seems unjust that the private schools can take and dismiss students at will. For justice's sake, I believe it is only fair that the student should have a school for the entire academic year. I think that it is inappropriate that a private can take the money and, based on their arbitrary rules, dismiss out of their system with little to no consideration about what is best for the child, but rather what they perceive as best for their institution. It is also the reason given as to why students get the scholarship for their entire academic career. The ability to stay with friends, but yet the private school is allowed to dismiss at will.

This diverting of dollars is very unfair to the taxpayers in the district. The projected cost includes the cost for an additional 36 students in grades K-8 who took the Ed Choice dollars. This cost will increase our total to \$345,000 for this year alone. The cost of providing for the student's entire 13 years of education for students will total in the millions. MY district cannot afford this cost. The resources projected that we would be expending is around 3% of our budget to pay for students that we

received no funding from the State. In the long term, resources that should have gone to students who remain in the district will be drained away, thus not allowing us to provide the necessary supports to the remaining students.

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.