

February 18, 2020

Dear Chairman Jones and Members of the House Bill 9 Committee:

My name is Nneka Slade Jackson. I am the proud parent of Kingston Jackson – 6th grader at *Richmond Heights Elementary School*. I serve as the current President of the *Richmond Heights Local School District* Board of Education. I stand in support of the House version of SB 89 provisions to phase out public-school district-paid EdChoice Vouchers at a time when the GainCap, Unreliable Report Card Measurements, and State Share unjustly penalizes our schools without adequate support for calculations. As a mother of three African-American boys I understand first-hand how critical choice is for parents. I am grateful for the opportunity to choose the best fit for my children, and I choose public school. I choose Richmond Heights.

The last four plus years our district was awarded the *Community Connectors Grant* in which our students – beginning in the 5th grade - had the opportunity to learn computer science, coding concepts and other career readiness skills associated with 21st century digital opportunities. The entire community exhibited much excitement around our collaboration with long-standing community partners to make this program a success for our students. The birth of the *Richmond Coders* was just one example of the spark that inspired residents in our community to double down.

Residents believe in the vision of our district's leadership. In 2017 they demonstrated their support by passing one of the state's largest levy issues. The Richmond Heights Community showed their support for PUBLIC SCHOOL in passing a 12.8 mil levy for the construction of a new secondary school. The project is funded 100 percent by local tax revenue. The Secondary School community learning center for our students will also include designated space for the Cuyahoga County Public Library, and programming for the local YMCA. . The Community and District are also excited about our new aviation program in collaboration with partners like Kent State University. Not only did residents approve dollars to build this new amazing project, but attached to the issue were funds for our district to operate successfully.

In fact, our Superintendent, Dr. Willis, has coined the term, *Circle of Believers* as the support for our schools has been consistently strong for the past 5 years. Not only are they confident in the success of our students, but the residents in Richmond Heights are savvy, and they trust that there are no world class communities with failing school districts. Therefore they go above and beyond to support by way of their time through volunteerism, and dollars through property taxes because they know that the success of our entire community is contingent upon the success of our public schools.

While you may review our district's state report card and would like to believe that our schools are failing, parents tend to know better. The Superintendent has analyzed the Graduation Rate

which triggers EdChoice in Richmond Heights. 5 of 13 Special Ed Students were severely disabled and counted as non-graduates but are entitled to education until age 21. Exclude Special Education students from the Graduation Rate and the District would receive a "B".

The District's enrollment is 90 percent black and 71 percent economically disadvantaged, yet the Gain Cap reduces funding in the opportunity grant, K-3 literacy, Economic Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficiency, Gifted Education, and Capacity Aid.

It is difficult to overcome the obstacle of the manufactured crisis that has been placed upon our district based on the flawed accountability practices in Ohio. Nonetheless, our students and teachers work hard to share the successes of the district despite the black cloud of the report card that publicly misrepresents the District Performance. The EdChoice expansion has put Richmond Heights Local School initiatives in jeopardy with the loss of the additional funds. (EdChoice payments rose 220 percent with the expansion).

We must inform residents that financial planning has become unstable for a number of significant reasons. These reasons include the fact that:

- We are a capped district so no matter how many students our new school will attract, the State will not provide the calculated and/or additional funding to educate them.
- The District Local Taxes are diverted well above the amount the State pays the District per Student.
- EdChoice expansion allows the State to increase the amount of local money diverted to a school with less accountability and the required standards for public education.
- Additionally, private school and religious schools are claiming funding they may constitutionally be prohibited from receiving

How do we continue to ask for residential support when the dollars cannot be used for what is intended – our public schools in Richmond Heights? I often hear that many of the consequences that we experience in RH are unintended. But when you are impacted by it daily it feels very intentional and in fact purposeful.

Please prove me wrong and begin to correct the funding drain on public education by stopping EdChoice Expansion first.

Support the House Version of SB 89.

Nneka Slade Jackson

Parent and Board President
Richmond Heights Local School District