

My name is Peggy Bouscher. I am a mother of four Ohio students, a teacher of twenty years, and a current private school administrator. I write to you today to voice my support for school choice and my deep disappointment in the recent actions you have taken to postpone and potentially revoke educational opportunities that were promised to Ohio families through the Traditional EdChoice Scholarship.

Poor Timing:

My most basic objection to your postponement is to the *timing*. To decide to revisit the EdChoice Scholarship Program in January and postpone the application window for thousands of Ohio families *at the last hour* feels like a *revocation of a promise* just moments before the promise was to be realized. Regardless of how one feels about the current report card system for public schools or the funding for EdChoice Scholarships, the process for the 2020-2021 school year was *already underway* for many Ohio families and under no circumstances should alterations to the scholarship program for the upcoming school year have been an option. The 2020-2021 List of Designated Schools was released on November first announcing to families across the state that scholarship opportunities were available to them. The invitation to these families was made, the opportunity for school choice was announced, the paperwork was released, the application window was set and promoted, and the process was underway. In preparation for this opportunity, many Ohio families made the difficult decision to uproot their children for what they saw as a better educational opportunity, they had the difficult conversations within the family, they met with private school administrators, they made the plans, they paid to register and enroll in the private school for the upcoming school year, they completed the paperwork, and they submitted the applications to be uploaded on February first. The plans were made and the process was already underway for these families based upon information that was released to them in November. I do not raise objection to the legislature examining the program for future modifications, but to do so for the current application window just hours before it opened was disgraceful. Any changes that your body decided upon concerning the EdChoice Scholarship Program should not have affected the current scholarship application process and 2020-2021 school year. It had already been announced, promoted, released, and many Ohio families took this as a promise that school choice finally extended to them. The promise to Ohio families was already made and to revoke this opportunity after it has already been offered is nothing short of dishonorable.

District Focus not Student Focus:

This late decision to postpone and revise the EdChoice Program seems to have been made with a misdirected focus on *school districts* rather than *school students*. If you truly seek to benefit the student and do what is in her best interest, then limiting her choices is not the solution. Ohio students should be able to take their educational dollars with them to the institution of learning that they and their families feel will best meet their needs. The decision making power should belong to the family. If the family chooses public education, then the educational dollars should go to benefit the child at the public school she attends. But, if the family chooses private education, then the dollars should follow the child and contribute to her learning at the private school. This is how it should be. School choice *should be available to all students*, not just

low-income students, not just students whose public schools are labeled as underperforming, but to all Ohio students.

Disappointed Families:

Finally, as a private school administrator, I have seen many families enter our building on the EdChoice Scholarship who have chosen private education because the public system was not working for them. They came to us with this wonderful opportunity, provided through the EdChoice Scholarship Program, to secure the type of education that they desired for their family but were never able to afford. I have met with many hard-working, tax-paying families who were hopeful that the scholarship opportunity would apply to them, yet their household income was above the qualifying amount. These families are by no means wealthy and have felt as though they have been forgotten. At the release of the 2020-2021 Designated School List and the Traditional Scholarship opportunity, several families of local high school students reached out to me grateful that the scholarship program had finally been extended to them and hopeful that their children would be educated in a manner that the family had desired for many years. These families thought, prayed, and discussed this decision with their children, knowing that transitioning to a new school in the high school years would not be easy. They attended meetings to gather information about the EdChoice Scholarship Program, they scheduled meetings with our school to discuss the potential move, they met our teachers, they sat in on our classes, they completed school application and registration processes including paying fees for these to be processed, they compiled the necessary documents and completed the necessary forms to apply for the scholarship, and they submitted it all with the expectation that, on February first, theirs would be among the first applications to be uploaded into the Ohio Department of Education system and hopefully, one of the first to be awarded. They were counting on this opportunity because they had been led to believe that it existed for them, only to have it all taken away at the last hour in what has appeared to them to be unbelievably unfair. These are hard-working, tax-paying, Ohio citizens who deserve to realize the opportunity that they had been promised.

The only right decision for the Ohio Legislature to make at this time is to reinstate the Traditional EdChoice Program for the 2020-2021 school year the way that it was promoted and promised to Ohio families. Any modifications that are made should not apply to the current window of application or the 2020-2021 school year.

Thank you,

Peggy Bouscher

Principal, East Liverpool Christian School
mrsbouscher@elchristian.org | 330.385.5588

