



**Testimony Regarding EdChoice Provisions of HB9
House Bill 9 Conference Committee
Representative Don Jones, Chair**

**Tim Weber, Superintendent
Wyoming City School District
February 19, 2020**

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. My name is Tim Weber and I am the proud Superintendent of Wyoming City Schools. Joining me today are Board President Jeanie Zoller, Board Vice President Kara Broderick, Treasurer Ronda Johnson and Director of Communications, Suzy Henke.

Wyoming City Schools is located in Hamilton County in southwest Ohio. We are a small suburban school district encompassing approximately 3 square miles and home to 8,000 residents. Our 2,000 students are served in 5 school buildings, including one high school, one middle school and three neighborhood primary schools. Our students are consistently among the highest performing in Ohio - performing among the top 20 school districts in the state for over a decade - while our spending is just slightly higher than the State Average. U.S. News & World Report recently ranked Wyoming High School in the top 75 high schools in the entire country! Our 3 primary schools are all ranked in the top 1.5% of all school buildings in the State!

Despite our strong history of consistent academic success, one of our school buildings - Wyoming Middle School - was placed on the EdChoice list for next school year. Our Middle School was designated as "failing" - even though the building earned an "A" for meeting the performance measures on the report card and was ranked in the top 9% of all public school buildings in performance index. The metric that deemed our A-rated, top-performing school as "failing" was a sliver of data in the value-added subcomponent - a metric designated by the Ohio Legislature in HB166 for improvement. This designation created confusion and frustration in our tight-knit school community and our families have rallied around the cause to protect their investment in our public schools. Please understand - we believe in accountability and continue to analyze student data and reflect on current practices with the goal for all students to reach their full potential. We are laser-focused - more than ever - on our students and their academic growth.

Wyoming's tax base is 95% residential - so our families, not business - shoulder the burden to fund our public schools. With deep gratitude, we have appreciated their unwavering support. Voter support has been a hallmark for generations, as Wyoming voters have supported every tax levy in the last 40 years. Our voted millage is 101.78 and our effective millage is 52.387, some of the highest millage rates in the State. In addition to that, our voters have supported two school income tax levies. We are hearing daily from our families that those votes were in support of Wyoming students, teachers and programs - not to support teachers and programs in a private school.

Wyoming appreciates the legislative effort that acknowledges more work to do on the report card components that led to school buildings like our middle school being placed on the EdChoice list and we understand that under HB9, Wyoming would no longer be designated as "failing" school. However, we remain deeply concerned about the increased diversion of state funding to private schools through the continued expansion of EdChoice. We believe this puts the future of public school funding at risk. Keeping the 200% poverty level threshold for the income-based, state-paid voucher is critical to ensuring that State resources allocated for public education are used for exactly that: public education programming!

Public School funding in Ohio has always been a shared responsibility between the State and the public school - with the state share being determined in many different ways over the years. In the last 20 years, we've been through several iterations of a school funding formula that used complex calculations (from the 23 mill chargeoff to a 29-factor state share index) to determine each individual district's state share. In every case, there was a reduction in the per pupil amount in the formula based on some measure of the local school districts ability to raise local tax revenue. Yet EdChoice expansion would hand over a flat rate (\$4650/\$6000) to a private school student - which seems egregiously unfair. Wyoming only receives \$2998 per student from the State - so our families are very confused about why a private school would receive more.

Our public school eagerly enrolls ALL STUDENTS - each and every one - within our boundaries regardless of income level, academic ability, or religious affiliation. Our public school is held accountable to every state mandate and every state test. Our public school is filled with incredible staff who hold educator licenses and are evaluated in a mandatory rigorous evaluation framework. Our public school finances are audited annually with the results posted to the public. Our locally elected board of education members hold public meetings where they answer to our taxpayers. Private schools do none of these things. Yet public school students will get less funding. Since it was our Middle School's designation of "failing" due to the value-added metric that engaged our families in this debate, we've been asked if private schools meet the value-added metrics? That is a question none of us in this room can answer.

I want to be very clear - we are not opposed to school choice - but we are vehemently opposed to public dollars being diverted to private education in the name of choice.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for this opportunity to share information regarding Wyoming City Schools and our testimony regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. We are happy to address any questions.