

Thursday, February 20, 2020

Good Evening Chairman Jones and committee members. Thank you for allowing me to speak today about such an important issue for the children and families of Ohio about House Bill 9. My name is Angie Schaal and today I speak to you as a parent of three school aged children and an educator. I am the Executive Director of Teaching and Learning for Bowling Green City Schools. Prior to this position I was a Regional Early Literacy Specialist for a Regional State Support Team and was a Principal at the elementary level for 8 years.

In my time today I want to talk about the unintended consequences that impact all learners in our state. Proponents of school vouchers say that parents should have the right to choose their children's education; that vouchers create a free marketplace for education overall to improve; that socioeconomic and racial segregations can be overcome with vouchers; and that vouchers lead to better student performance. (<https://www.procon.org/headline.php?headlineID=005354>)

The data in Ohio does not indicate any of those things are happening. In fact, as evident by the number of schools and districts potentially being added this year the opposite of these things are taking shape in Ohio. Overall, education has not improved for all learners and there is no evidence of overcoming the barriers of socioeconomic and racial segregation. Parents are able to choose but it is not necessarily a better option. In fact the data available for Ohio's Voucher students on our state assessments are abysmal with proficiency rates below the state average and in many cases lower than the rates of districts parents choose to leave.

Ed Choice is meant to provide opportunity for learners, but it is not proving to do this in action. It is not being monitored to ensure a better education for all learners. There is no system of accountability for the schools that families choose to attend using the Ed Choice voucher. Ed Choice has not improved our state literacy scores. Choice across our country has not improved literacy achievement according to annual NAEP data. What Ed Choice has done for Ohio is perpetuate failure for our neediest students. Children who already begin behind due to poverty, special needs and other factors remain at risk for failure. These are the students this law presumes to protect, but that is not what our achievement data indicates. In taking funds away from our public schools, we take away from all students. This program has quietly begun to dismantle public education. The funding formula penalizes school districts by requiring districts to pay more than they receive per pupil. This is not a fair system for students that remain in public schools. Those desperately needed funds prevent districts from making the necessary improvements and implementing supports for teachers and students. This is true in our district.

We have identified our instructional needs as well as the professional development and curriculum required to support reading achievement for all of our learners. To move forward on these initiatives requires funding. When our district is forced to give a higher amount than we receive per pupil using Ed Choice we limit what we have available to do what we know will benefit our learners.

Anyone that has ever met me understands my deep passion of educating each and every child. Throughout my career, whatever title I have held, my decisions are always based on what is best for students and learning. I care deeply for educators but their needs are always put behind the needs of the learner when I am tasked with difficult decisions. I understand the decision you must face and hope you to make the decision based on all learners and the adult wants and needs come after those of the children in our state.

Providing this false sense of choice is not the answer. Fixing a broken system that prepares educators, engages families and sets meaningful expectations are the catalyst for what will make a difference. Public Education cannot continue to shoulder the burden of funding Ed Choice. We need to fund a system that supports the dedicated educators we have through professional development, time to engage in collaboration and systems of sustainability. If choice is still an option it cannot be the burden of children and teachers. The way Ed Choice is currently structured is a system that keeps all of our children from obtaining high levels of achievement. As a parent and educator I want all kids to have access to the best educational opportunities in our state. This is a lofty goal and choice can be a part of that but the choice needs accountability and cannot be at the expense of the public school system. For some children public school is the only choice and as a state we should be supporting the public system to be the absolute best option for all learners.

Thank you for your time and consideration for the learners of Ohio.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela M. Schaal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angela M. Schaal, Ed.S

Executive Director of Teaching and Learning

Bowling Green City Schools