

February 19, 2020

Dear Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am writing in support of SB 89.

My name is Cheryl Scacheri, and I have been a proud resident of Shaker Heights for 14 years.

My husband, Peter, is a cancer researcher and Professor at Case Western Reserve University. We chose to move to Shaker Heights because of the quality of the schools and the strength and diversity of the community. Over the years, we have had several opportunities to move out of Ohio, but the Shaker community and public school education our children are receiving have kept us here every time.

I have a son who is a freshman at Shaker High School and a daughter who is a 6th grader at Woodbury. When I told my son about EdChoice and his former schools, Onaway and Woodbury, being put on the list, he quoted our slogan "a community is known by the schools it keeps." Shaker residents are almost fanatical in our dedication to our district's public schools. We have a lot to rave about, given the quality of the administrators and educators, and the range of activities and experiences our children have had. We also recognize that the socioeconomic and racial diversity of our schools create areas of tension and a host of issues that other schools may not face. The impressive thing about Shaker public schools is that our administration, board, students and community aren't afraid to tackle these issues head on. We are leaders in this area and don't shy away from the tough stuff. The tag line of shaker.org is "Excellence Equity Exploration." I encourage you to look at the district's website, where you will see many examples of our commitment to these ideals.

My children have had countless amazing opportunities and experiences in Shaker schools. They play instruments and sports, they have learned how to do research and give presentations. My freshman son traveled to Washington, D.C. and my 6th grade daughter is going to Columbus with Model UN next month. They have been taught how to be good global citizens since kindergarten. Their Shaker public school educations are preparing them to be successful and productive adults.

I have a story about Onaway, one of the schools on the EdChoice list. Picture my daughter - a little girl, barely 10 years old, making her big entrance in a sparkly red dress on the stage at Onaway Little Theatre. The play, *Seussical*, was produced by Shaker mom and Onaway teacher, Lisa; the stage was built by Shaker parents, who include engineers, artists and architects; her dress was made by a very talented Shaker mom, Mercy. Eric Forman, Onaway's principal, supported the production throughout, attending rehearsals and performances outside of school hours. The little girl up on the Onaway stage finds her voice and her passion through a life-changing 4th grade play. Her newfound love of theater has led her to be in two other plays in the Shaker school district, where she has made friends and learned a true craft from outstanding *professional* directors. We have paid no fees for her to participate in these productions, and yet her experiences have been priceless. Academically, both of my kids earn good grades and have consistently scored in the top 10th percentile on standardized tests. They continue to do very well socially and academically in their post-Onaway years. This is exactly what I hope for from my children's schools.

Onaway received a B on the State Report Card. It's failing metric was in the "Progress" category. When I consider that this is the metric being used to redistribute our taxpayer money away from Onaway and towards private schools, I feel devastated, misunderstood and called to action. I think about how frequently these little 9- and 10-year olds are being tested. Maybe it's too often to measure a difference. Both of my kids have had their test scores go down once or twice. It's bound to happen when they are taking so many tests while living their full (and sometimes messy) lives. Those dips in their scores don't reflect their *actual* progress, however. They are always making progress, as young people in the community and as students, even if a math or reading test fails to capture it. Shaker public schools understands this.

Specifically, Shaker is working on equity issues. To take our local tax dollars away from a school when the community is rallying around issues of fairness and success for all students would fracture our community at a critical time. Shaker is making tremendous progress in this area and deserves a chance to continue working towards our goals. Redirecting money away from the district at this time would be devastating.

The Shaker public schools and the Shaker community are one and the same. We have a diverse and dedicated school board (including competitive elections!) and staff who live and work in Shaker. Parents *and* children meet and make friends at our schools. We cheer on our sports teams, applaud our musicians, learn from our children's presentations, and participate in community service - together, as Shakerites.

If left unchanged, EdChoice will undermine our public schools at a time when they are thriving and are making significant improvements. I'm certain this is not what was intended with this bill. Shaker schools are the heart and soul of our city and I would love for members of the committee to visit any one of our amazing schools to see for themselves. Our superintendent, Dr. David Glasner, has made very reasonable recommendations for changes to EdChoice and I implore you to adopt the recommendations in his proposal.

I appreciate your leadership in education policy for our state and thank you for your urgent attention to this issue.

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 and can be reached at scacheri55@gmail.com or 202-744-4731.

Most sincerely,
Cheryl Scacheri
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