

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's Ed Choice Voucher program. I am Doug Baldwin, Superintendent of Wolf Creek Local Schools. My district is made up of 635 students in grades K-12, in rural southeastern Ohio.

I feel that the implementation of the EdChoice Voucher program is an unfair program that will be taking tax money away from public schools, in which the tax payers have agreed to support based on the passage of levies. The residents in my district believe that their tax money that is collected is being used to fund the schools in the district where their taxes are collected. The performance measures that are being used are also not comparing apples to apples when it comes to the assessments that the students are required to complete to determine a school's "rating".

If the performance based voucher system remains in place as written, our district could lose \$147,000. Even though this does not sound like a large amount of money, in a district of our size, this can have a great effect. In fiscal year 19, our district received \$3440.89 per student from the state of Ohio. The current plan would require our local taxpayers to pay the difference between this amount and the \$4,647. This would be \$1209.11 per student, of local tax dollars that would be taken from the district in addition to the state foundation money.

If our district were to have additional students take advantage of the voucher program, there would be an additional loss of funds as our ADM would decline.

Our district has not asked our voters for an increase in tax revenue in over 15 years. As a parent and teacher, I served as the chairman of that levy committee and was successful in passing our current emergency operating levy. I vaguely remember our talking points at that time, however, smaller class size, maintaining existing facilities, keeping existing staffing positions, and many other items which centered on the students attending Waterford Elementary and Waterford High school were items that were important to our taxpayers. I do not recall once mentioning, nor campaigning that we would be supporting students who chose to attend the small parochial schools within our county. However, we continue to support those students everyday by providing transportation, speech services, access to our school psychologist, Title I services, and extracurricular activities. These students are members of our community and we invite them to be members of our school community as well.

The option of voucher funding based on income-based need that prioritizes low income children directly flowing from the state, rather than a deduction system from the local funding structure making the current legislation better. If the legislature believes it is best to fund vouchers then they should provide a means for funding the program rather than placing the burden on the taxpayers. However, before we have a funding plan for alternative forms of education the Ohio General Assembly needs to address the unconstitutional funding system for public schools that is currently in place.

It seems to me that if a system is going to be developed to assist in providing tuition funds to individuals who are choosing to leave public education to be educated in a private facility, these funds should not be taken from the taxpayers who have not had any input on where their funds are flowing. Is this a measure that should ultimately be voted on by the voters in Ohio? If we are going to determine a school's value and rating based on state assessments and how the students perform on the one assessment, that is taken on one day during the school year, then shouldn't all schools both public and private have their success measured using the same criteria.

In recent months I have been asked what happened that placed Waterford Elementary in the category to become an EdChoice school. I have had to explain that it is based on a flawed report card system. As a matter of fact, there has been a Committee looking at this issue that is made up of Superintendents, Department of Education staff and State Legislatures. This group has addressed the public stating that the current report card and accountability system is flawed and is not a good measure of student growth or progress. Prior to the current report card system our district was rated Excellent five consecutive years in a row. Since the flawed Letter grade system has been in place we have continually improved and last year our overall grade was a C. In the 2015-16 school year we received a Momentum Award for exceeding expectations in student growth.

In addition, if a student leaves our district to attend a private or parochial school, they are not required to take the same high stakes test as public school students. Therefore, the accountability system in which we are grading schools, is an unfair model of comparison. If the State of Ohio is going to pay for a voucher program with public funds, then any school- public or private, should be held to the same accountability standards. Anyone who receives public funds should also be required to accept or enroll any student who applies. In public schools, we must educate all who live within our boundaries, while private schools are able to accept students who fit their criteria or pay their tuition fees. In public education, we provide an education to all students. Many of our students do not have early interventions or preparation prior to attending school. We also educate students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and all family structures. We are responsible for not only educating students in academics, but we are also filling the shoes of the parents in ensuring that students are being fed, learning manners, and leaving school ready to become productive members of society. These are some of the expectations that our voters have for the school staff.

In closing, I would like for you to consider the many factors that need to be examined and the effect that your decisions will have on the education of all children in the state of Ohio. These children are our future and they all deserve to have opportunities to learn and become a better citizen.

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 answer any questions.