

Good Evening and thank you Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee for the opportunity to testify on the matter of EdChoice. My name is Francis Scruci and I am the Superintendent of the Bowling Green City Schools in Northwest Ohio. I want to thank you for taking time to carefully consider this issue rather than making a hasty 11th hour decision.

The EdChoice voucher system is one that I believe began with all the right intentions but once put in practice has had unintended consequences that have adversely affected public schools. However, it has unified all public schools in opposition. We have unified because regardless if the district is an affluent, high performing, urban, rural, suburban, or poor district we have all been included due to a system that has flaws.

My concern begins with the fact that based on the system as it stands today without any changes would result in over 400 public school districts having at least one building in EdChoice. Two years ago the State designated approximately 250 school buildings with that number rising this year to 517. As it stands, Ohio would have approximately 1270 buildings in EdChoice next year. I attended the OSBA's Capital Conference in November. At a session led by ODE, we were told based on the current metrics the number of buildings would grow by another fifty percent to over 1800 buildings this time next year. Those are staggering numbers and that alone should be alarming. You are representing a lot of public schools that are being adversely impacted. The bleeding of money from the public schools to fund a student attending a private school only compounds our issues. One could believe as evidenced by the actions of Betsy DeVos and the flawed systems that exist throughout the Country that Public Schools are under attack to privatize education. This Nation has been founded on public education and has provided many of our citizens including distinguished lawmakers with a quality education.

I support and have always supported a parent's right to raise their child the way they see fit based on their beliefs. However, I cannot support that many of our public schools are being lumped together as failing when in fact most are performing as good if not better than our neighboring private schools, while the private schools are not being held to the same standards as their public counterparts.

When I began my tenure in Bowling Green our district was notified that we would be in the Ohio Improvement Process. Through hard work, the use of best practices and a true focus on instruction, we earned our way out of OIP and were removed from that list. In addition, over the last 3 consecutive years our district has earned the Ohio Department of Education's Momentum Award given to districts showing student growth of at least one year or more. We share that distinction with only 47 other districts and are 1 of only 14 who have received this distinction the past 3 consecutive years. How can we be recognized for a job well done and yet have a building currently in EdChoice? Imagine the shock felt by our Board of Education, administration, teachers, parents and community members that despite these academic successes, we were designated with an EdChoice building. Furthermore, how can districts with an overall grade A, B, or C have a building in EdChoice if the district is considered proficient or

better? However, we have also been effected by the designation at the ballot box where community members who vote no because they believe that we are failing at educating our students. This has made the job of passing levies even more difficult.

We have two elementary buildings currently designated because of the 3rd Grade Literacy component. However, those buildings are a victim of an increasing poverty rate found in Bowling Green which also serves as the County Seat of Wood County. Data will show students of poverty come to school with a deficit of nearly 18,000 vocabulary words compared to their typical peers who are not in poverty. Our teacher's task is a monumental one as they try to get those students on par with their typical peers. We accept that challenge but it is one that we know is an uphill battle.

The EdChoice Voucher Program permits a student who has never stepped foot in one of our school buildings to take advantage of the voucher. Another unintended consequence.

The attack on public schools is not a new phenomenon and can be traced back to No Child Left Behind. That legislation was enacted because of the failing inner City Schools throughout our Country who were passing students on without achievement. I fully support accountability as do all of my colleagues. No Child Left Behind changed public schools dramatically and unfortunately it along with EdChoice has become an indictment on all public schools. The Report Card system in Ohio has been under major scrutiny and has been linked to just another way to attempt to provide data that public schools are failing, thus giving credence to privatizing education. I ask that you carefully consider moving forward and look at EdChoice critically and determine what the real end game is. I stand with and for public schools and believe that we are doing the job we were tasked with and that is educating every student who walks through our doors regardless of socio-economics, demographics, and learning disabilities. Thank you for your time and allowing me to testify today.