

Good evening Chairman Jones and the members of the Conference Committee,

My name is Jamie Thompson and I am a preschool intervention specialist at Steubenville City Schools. I am a proud graduate of Steubenville High School class of 2007. After graduation I went to a nearby college with the hopes of returning to my alma mater to teach. I have always believed in Steubenville City Schools and needless to say I was surprised to find out that Harding Middle School was on the EdChoice list. I was even more shocked to find out that 103 students from Jefferson County receive EdChoice Vouchers this year for a total of \$412,000. Four years ago there were only 30 students receiving EdChoice Vouchers. In that same four years, four out of the five school districts in Jefferson County have had levies on the ballot. My shock increased even more when I started to talk to my colleagues across the state and learned the multitude of ways that EdChoice Vouchers have impaired their ability to provide services to their students.

When I think of Steubenville City Schools, I think of the amazing extracurricular opportunities that we have for our students, such as SeaPerch, Garden Club, eSports, and Destination Imagination to name just a few. We offer an Aviation program at the high school level and Coding programs starting at the elementary level. All six schools in our district have music programs and art programs. Both band and orchestra begin in the 4th grade and continue through high school. The middle school and the high school both have amazing drama clubs, who put on musicals at least three times a year, which often include the younger students in the district. When I think of the funding that EdChoice vouchers take away from my district and districts like mine, I worry about the future of the art, music, and STEM programs. We all know it's these "extras" are often the first cut from school budgets when funding isn't available. Harding Middle School, which I mentioned is on the EdChoice list, currently has almost 200 students in the band if you combine 5th through 8th grade. The strings program with the orchestra has exploded in the past few years. Students can also belong to the Jazz Choir, which is an advanced contemporary acapella group. The drama club musical productions could rival any high school production, including their production of Lion King Jr. this past fall.

When I started to think about why my school district has access to such excellent programming while other districts struggle to cover essential services like special education, I immediately go back to state programs like vouchers that take away funds from public schools. Even if our school was taken off the list, I believe that performance-based, district-funded vouchers make it nearly impossible for other districts to have access to what their students need. On Monday, during my day off, I sat through 9 hours of testimony and heard a few parents talk about the importance of "choice". My students and their students have many choices- the choice to participate in art, music, STEM, code, and dance.

When I was in elementary school, I went to Wells Parental School of Choice for Fine Arts, where we had art, music, drama, and dance on a daily basis. It is there that I fell in love with all of them. I tried band in 5th grade. I danced in the talent show that same year. I participated in choir from 6th through 9th grade. I also found a home in theater at Harding Middle School, that continued through to I graduated. I won a state award in 10th grade for a picture I painted. My mom was a preschool teacher and my dad was a Sheriff's deputy. They worked hard, but wouldn't have had extra money to put me in private classes. If it wasn't for my public school education, I never would have experienced music and art the way that I did.

When I think of the students in my current elementary school, who are primarily from low-income families, I wonder what art and music opportunities they will get to experience. Just

this past Tuesday, as I was on bus duty, the first graders couldn't wait to show me the hamsters they drew in class. The Kindergarteners flashed the friendship bracelets they made in art. Both are projects connected to our One School, One Book program. I think about the three, four, and five-year-olds in my classroom who drew their 10th rainbow of the day, because they are pretty. Or the portrait of me they painted that might have been missing a leg or an arm, but they are so proud of their creation. I think of the three-year-old non-verbal student who struggles to connect with her peers, but will be in the middle of the dance floor when I turn GoNoodle on. I sit and I wonder will they get to foster their current imagination and excitement for the arts? I wonder if seven years from now will they get to experience a Harding Middle School that is flourishing with art and music programs or will the EdChoice Vouchers steal away the funding for these programs and snuff out their creativity. Will they join the 44,027 students in Ohio who currently do not have art programs in their public schools?

This committee has a difficult choice to make- the choice to adequately fund our public schools and make our current voucher system funded by the state or to continue stealing educational choices from more than million children that attend Ohio's public schools. I urge the Senate to bring programs back to public school districts by passing SB 89 as passed by the house.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your consideration. I am available to respond to any questions you may have.