

Good morning,

I am a resident of Columbus and mother of three children currently in grades 5, 3, and kindergarten. When our oldest child was ready to enter kindergarten, we decided that Columbus City schools could not provide our children with the education, environment, or enrichment leading to a quality education. Safety was not good enough. Over all standards were not good enough. Religious practices are not tolerated equally. Conservative Christian beliefs are too often viewed as offensive. This was not a system we wanted to put our children into.

We wanted a private school education to ensure that our children would receive a quality education and a safer environment. This education and environment would also align with our family beliefs. However, the cost was more than we could afford. We qualified for the Ed Choice expansion scholarship and was able to choose a private education. Our children are thriving and very successful in a private school because of the funding we receive through Ed Choice. Without this program, we could be forced to pull them from an institution that has them excelling, teachers and friends they have come to love, and an environment where they are safe and feel secure. They are being taught excellence above grade level standards, kindness, compassion, respect, and becoming responsible citizens for tomorrow through principles of our faith. These aspects would not be the same in our local public school. Without the voucher program we would be forced to educate through local public schools that do not provide the safety, education or environment that our children deserve.

The Ed Choice program should remain for Ohio students and their families. The program should also allow for higher income thresholds for full scholarships. I am an advocate for raising the income threshold to 250% as proposed by the Ohio House or 300% as proposed by the Ohio Senate. The thresholds are gross income; but cost of living is high, and wages do not increase to keep us with costs. Taxes and medical insurance premiums must come from that gross amount; families do not see the full 200% income. Increasing the 100% full scholarship threshold for income-based scholarships will allow families of lower and modest incomes to not be limited to public education system.

The Ed Choice program should also make a way for students to transition from the Ed Choice expansion to the traditional scholarship if their assigned school is on the designated list. If a student is already in private school on the expansion scholarship, they should be able to transition to the traditional scholarship IF they are going to receive a prorated scholarship and their assigned public school is designated. They should be able to take advantage of the full scholarship funds available to them because their assigned public school is under performing and should not be limited to partial scholarships because they are already on the expansion program but over the full scholarship threshold. You could have two students sitting in a classroom beside each other in a private school assigned to the same designated public school and one student is not receiving the full scholarship available because they are on an expansion scholarship already while they other receives the full scholarship amount available. If their assigned school is on the designated list, both students should receive full scholarship funds available because their school is under performing. One family should not be short changed because they initially received the scholarship on a financial need basis.

We have two children that are recipients of the Ed Choice expansion scholarship, and our youngest has received the traditional scholarship as our assigned elementary has since joined the designated school list. We are currently under the 200% threshold but run close to surpassing that figure withing the next school year or two. This would lead to a prorated scholarship for our older two kids. The few hundred

dollars over the 200% income level for full scholarships does not provide enough in pocket funds for the thousands of dollars in tuition we would incur because it would no longer be written off.

Any changes made to the system should allow current voucher recipients to renew their scholarship and not be viewed as new applications. But that renewal should be evaluated under any new income threshold increases and should also allow for students on the traditional scholarship to remain under scholarship if their public-school falls from designation due to any changes to the program. Whether a renewal or a new applicant, a student should NOT have to have attended a public school to be eligible for a voucher after any changes to the program.

Education is a right of every child. Neither students nor parents should have to settle for a K-12 education that leaves students with a sub-par academic experience or an unsafe environment. Funding is allocated for every child to receive a public education through the state's Department of Education's General Revenue fund, local funding such as property taxes, Ohio lottery profits and even federal funds. Since funding is budgeted for every child to receive a public education, funding SHOULD be able to follow a student to the school of their choice. It should NOT stay in the district to be consumed or squandered. The student for which those funds were indented should benefit from the dollars directly in an education of their choice. As a homeowner paying property taxes, why should my children loose funding from a system that I am directly paying into because we want to choose the education our children receive rather than participate in a public education. Our family should NOT lose the funds set aside for our children's education. A voucher program allows our children to receive partial funding for an education that is the best fit for our kids.

The Ed Choice program needs to remain and should NOT be replaced with a Buckeye scholarship program based solely on income. School "grades" should remain. Parents and taxpayers have a right to know the level of performance from their local schools that they are funding. Parents have a right to know whether their assigned public school is performing well enough to support their child. There needs to be accountability for school boards, superintendents, administrators, and teachers. Any voucher/scholarship program should have a two-fold system. There should be a component that allows for scholarships based on financial need, but also a component that allows scholarship based on your assigned public school's performance. Limiting education choice by limiting vouchers limits our youths' possibilities and the rights of families to choose an education that is best for their children.

Vouchers provide families with a choice to select the best education for their child and potentially provide them with opportunities they would not otherwise have. We should not limit our youth and keep them from as much success as possible because of their education options. Vouchers do not hurt education but provide families with resources. Keeping children in an education system that isn't working is a waste of money.

This is an important topic that impacts so many children and families. Being enrollment/re-enrollment season, this debate is leaving families unsure of how to proceed for next year. Not knowing where any program changes will leave the voucher system and the impact that may have on current and future students leaves so many families in flux. If a decision cannot be made quickly, the program should remain as is for the 2020-2021 school year and the debate continue for any changes for the 2021-2022 school year and following. We owe it to our Ohio families and students to resolve this as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and considering the views and opinions of a tax paying Ohio resident with young children who this directly impacts.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Payne