

From: Katrina Heinzen, parent of a 5th grader in the Cleveland Heights/University Heights School District

The EdChoice Voucher system and the state “report card” for schools are weakening public education in Ohio. And they are wrecking communities. I call them the City Killers. Cities like mine, a beautifully diverse community, are starting to crumble due to the high property taxes required to compensate for EdChoice monies lost. When high taxes are weighed against the *perceived* poor quality of public schools - the perception created by the flawed report card system - then who wants to live in this city anymore? People are leaving at an alarming rate! The debate is heated (and hateful) surrounding our tax levy up for vote in March. A levy which would not be necessary if it were not for EdChoice. Our property taxes are already too high. And at the same time housing values drop – this is due, in part, to the report card system. When housing values drop funding decreases. (People might appreciate the depreciation cutting their taxes... until they want to sell and lose tens of thousands like we did when we moved locally.) Please stop this insane cycle. It is a complex disaster that is gaining momentum with the EdChoice expansion. So many flawed laws. Will you speed up this downward spiral or fix it? My whole community is in crisis. Others will follow across the state.

The state should not take money from district budgets to pay tuitions at private schools. It is not tenable. We didn't vote for our money to leave our school district. I believe some wealthy influencers like the Koch brothers want to dismantle the public education system; please stop these nefarious steps towards that goal and undo the damage that has been done.

We had a good thing going in Ohio and I can speak about the Cleveland region specifically: we were attracting business, seeing economic growth and attracting intellectuals who saw the value of raising their families in the gorgeous and interesting communities surrounding Cleveland. These are communities that have a low cost of living --except for very high property taxes. Voucher proponents might argue that these same intellectuals are not using the public schools at a very high rate and that it is the voucher availability that attracts them to the area, rather than strong public schools. But a truly savvy homebuyer will know that strong schools will help their home keep its value in the long run and this could well be worth more than a tuition savings. Thriving schools are at the foundation of economic success in many ways.

The private school students who have been so emotional while giving testimony about their fears of losing vouchers are interesting, but I find I cannot get too sucked in to this viewpoint. My child is in the racial minority in his elementary school and he is thriving. He has never reported feeling unsafe. We choose public schools and we choose living in Cleveland Heights/University Heights because we want our son to be part of a diverse population. I want his heart to hold true the fact that people who are different than him are *valued individuals*. And in fact are not actually different from him in the ways that matter most. I don't want him to walk the earth in arrogance for his many abilities and opportunities. So while I am grateful he is soaring in his endeavors, I do fear arrogance. We choose public schools to help him “keep it real” with a broad perspective. Arrogance leads to the objectification of others. And once you objectify a group - whether it be for gender, race, socio-economic status, or even cognitive ability – then you become capable of making decisions counter to their best interests. And in arrogance you become capable of finding ways to twist the facts to justify your decisions. I do not want my son to live in a twisted or limited reality; I want him to walk a path of compassion and to be continually asking himself how he can use his gifts to improve the problems he sees. So I plunk him down into the middle of people facing difficult problems such as poverty. I hope he will help lead humanity towards justice, not away from it. Where do your steps take you? Towards justice for all? Towards opportunity via quality education –for all?

I fully support the statements you have heard from Cleveland Heights-University Heights school board members such as Jodi Sourini who spell out the dire financial situation perfectly. So I took a different approach. Thank you for your careful consideration of the depth and severity of consequences for my community. There is a lot of work to do to fix this system – I hope solutions start now!