

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: February 20, 2020

Name: Bradley L. Blandin

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Lake Local Schools

Position/Title: School Board Member, Parent

Address: 2329 Pheasant Drive

City: Northwood State: OH Zip: 43619

Best Contact Telephone: (419) 346-4253 Email: bblandin@lakeschools.org

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB9

Specific Issue: EdChoice

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Share my view of EdChoice as a school board member, parent, and taxpayer.

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: FEBRUARY 20, 2020

Name: JIM WITT

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): LAKE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Position/Title: SUPERINTENDENT

Address: 28090 LEMOYNE ROAD

City: MILLSBORO State: OHIO Zip: 43447

Best Contact Telephone: 419-350-1642 Email: jwitt@lakeschools.org

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HOUSE BILL 9

Specific Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 2-3 MINUTES

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

OPPOSED TO BJ CHOICE.

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# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 2/17/2020

Name: Monica Leppelmeier

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Lake Local Schools

Position/Title: Board member

Address: 5700 Libbey Rd

City: Perrysburg State: OH Zip: 43551

Best Contact Telephone: 419-351-3440 Email: monica.leppelmeier@gmail.com

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): House Bill 9

Specific Issue: Educational Choice Scholarship Program

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 3 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Please see attached document.

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Jodi A. Takats, Ph.D.

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Lake Local Schools

Position/Title: Director of Curriculum + Special Education

Address: 28090 Lemoyne Road

City: Millbury State: Ohio Zip: 43447

Best Contact Telephone: 419-661-6679 Email: jtakats@lakeschools.org

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 9

Specific Issue: Ed Choice

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Share my view of the current school testing and report card system.

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# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: February 20, 2020

Name: Timothy Krugh

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Lake Local Schools (Wood County)

Position/Title: President, Lake School Board

Address: 1520 Millbury Road

City: Northwood State: Ohio Zip: 43619

Best Contact Telephone: 419-494-9307 Email: tkrugh@rcolaw.com

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): House Plan - SB 89

Specific Issue: Ed Choice Reform

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5-7 minutes

*The current Ed Choice program is either a shining example of unintended consequences or, more cynically, a successful example of intended consequences run amok. Either way, Ed choice must be reformed and restricted to its original purpose: to provide an option to our poorest students in our worst schools. Otherwise, as we are now experiencing, it will serve as yet another, in a whole series, of blows to virtually all Ohio public schools. This body and all the powers-to-be in Columbus must restore public education to the priority that our Constitution and our future well-being as a state requires. House Plan - SB 89 is a first step*

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*toward accomplishing this worthy, and necessary, priority.*



Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Brad Blandin and I am a life-long resident of Northwest Ohio. I am a Christian and a conservative Republican. I practice law as a partner with a distinguished Toledo law firm. I serve on several non-profit boards, volunteer as a coach of my kids' sports, and serve in my church's youth ministry. Most importantly, I am the proud father of four beautiful children. I am here today as a member of the Board of Education of Lake Local Schools in Wood County, a parent of current students and a graduate of Lake Local Schools, and a concerned taxpayer.

I'd like to begin with a story about a student in Northwest Ohio. From an early age, this student excelled academically and quickly became bored with school. Wanting the best for their child, the student's parents explored opportunities to enhance their child's education, including private and parochial schools. The parents also met with the leaders of the student's public-school system and together they developed a plan to challenge the student. Ultimately, the student stayed in the public-school system and thrived. The student graduated with honors from the public-school system with 59 college credit hours and scored a 32 on the ACT. The student is currently studying accounting as a student ambassador for the College of Business at Bowling Green State University. Why do I share this story with you? Two reasons: 1) the student graduated from an Ohio-designated "failing" public-school system and 2) I fear that the current assumption is that the only option for a student in this situation is to move to a private or parochial school. Fortunately, the student's parents – my wife and I – were able to see through the smoke created by the school grade card system and understand that our children are receiving a quality education at Lake Schools. Further, it is evidence that public schools are capable of amazing things and school choice isn't the only fix.

I see several issues with the EdChoice Voucher program:

1. School Grade Cards – The current school grade card system is fundamentally flawed, resulting in embarrassingly deficient "grade cards" that purport to gauge and report on the effectiveness of our public schools. This system has labeled schools from **70% of Ohio's school districts** as "failing." In my community, Lake Schools has mysteriously transitioned from "Excellent with Distinction" to "Failing" virtually overnight. Yet, SB9 proposes to continue using this broken system in administering the EdChoice Voucher program. This defies all logic. If the grade card system is clearly defective, the prudent and logical approach would be to fix it before expanding the program.

As an aside, has consideration been given to the economic impact that branding the **majority** of our public schools as "failing" has had on Ohio's ability to attract new businesses and jobs? As we all know, one of the first things prospective out-of-state businesses evaluate is the quality of education in the community in which they are considering investment. Would a business market its product by declaring "the majority of our products were made by failing systems"? Of course not, yet this is precisely what

Ohio has done. This must be taken into consideration when developing a new system of evaluating and measuring our schools.

2. Accountability – If the trigger for diverting State and local tax dollars from public schools is performance on Ohio’s accountability mechanism, the principles of fairness and equity would seem to mandate that the recipients of these tax dollars be held to the same accountability standards. Yet, EdChoice does not require this. I think logical minds can agree that the accountability standards should apply to all schools – public and private – receiving tax dollars.
3. Discrimination – Public schools are rightfully required to educate every student in their district. Should this not be a requirement of *every* school – public and private – receiving tax dollars? Again, the logical mind would answer affirmatively, yet the EdChoice program allows private and parochial schools to have “admission standards” that effectively allows them to pick and choose which EdChoice students they would like to admit. This is an eloquent way of saying they have the ability to discriminate. This is unconscionable and has no place in education.
4. Overreach of State Government – Over the years, Ohio has reduced education funding, placing more of the funding burden on local taxpayers. Throughout Ohio, school districts have repeatedly gone to voters seeking levies and income taxes to replace the reduction in State funding. Personally, this year my wife and I will pay \$12,422.19 in real estate tax, of which \$7,048 will go to Lake Local Schools. I was astounded to learn that EdChoice will redirect my tax dollars to private and parochial schools. To summarize, Ohio decided to reduce education funding and place the burden on local taxpayers, who have responded by supporting levies and taxes, and now Ohio, in search of more dollars, decides to grab *local* tax dollars from public schools and redirect them to private and parochial schools. I find this absolutely appalling and I am confident that most land owners, including the many farmers in Lake Township and throughout Ohio, share the same sentiments as I on this issue. I strongly support SB89 because it addresses this improper redirecting of local funds.

The reality of the situation is that Ohio’s method of funding public education is broken and insufficient to meet the educational needs of our youth. Expansion of the EdChoice program simply exacerbates the problem. More resources and innovative ideas are necessary to fix the problem. It is important to understand that Ohio’s businesses have a vested interest in the success of our schools to ensure the ongoing viability and success of their businesses. How do we partner with and encourage Ohio’s businesses to invest in the schools? I encourage our elected officials to engage the business community in seeking innovative solutions to the problem.

Chairman Jones and members of the HB9 conference committee, thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts regarding Ohio’s EdChoice Voucher program. I am happy to address any questions you may have.



**TESTIMONY FOR HOUSE BILL 9 CONFERENCE COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 20, 2020**

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. My name is Jim Witt, and I am the superintendent of the Lake Local School District in northern Wood County.

This is currently my fourteenth year in this position. I am proud of our schools and proud of our community, but mostly I am proud of the type of young people we have in our district. We place a high priority on educating ALL of our students. Every year we have to turn away students with disabilities in our open enrollment program because our teachers are at federal case limits. Our reputation for helping that population of young people is very solid. Lake Schools' personnel also fulfill the obligation of writing Individualized Education Programs for our local EdChoice approved entities. Last week, we had one of these meetings and it was the first time our representative saw the building administrator at one of these reviews that is so vitally important in the eyes of those lawmakers in Washington who tie funding to federal programming. At the risk of repeating what I assume you have heard over and over in these hearings, our test scores on what most people believe to be a flawed report card are much higher than the institution of which I speak.

Last April, we admitted a young lady to our district from Toledo. She was placed on "administrative leave" from a private school in Lucas County for a same sex relationship. According to the letter notifying the young lady and her family of her removal from the school, the investigative process was designed to "be reflective of biblical grace and discipline.....Nevertheless, as the Lord disciplines those He loves, so in this situation there are consequences for her actions." The letter, which is two pages in length, does not once use the word "forgiveness." As I stand before you today, I can tell you that this young lady has positively impacted our high school in many ways. We are so glad to have her as a Flyer! Just this week a young man who lives in our district was expelled from a local Catholic high school. We were told that he was expelled forever and the reason we were given for his expulsion was that he was the loudest kid in a small school and they felt it was better for him to attend a bigger school where his voice would be drowned out. The point I am trying to illustrate here is the uneven playing field public schools face. Private and parochial institutions can pick and choose their students. They can remove students on a whim. Public schools do not have that

option. We take 'em all and we roll up our sleeves and educate them to the best of our ability.

But it does not stop at educating students. We feed them, we clothe them, we pay for fees, we love them, we spend time with them, and we do so much more than just the traditional classroom routine of, and I am dating myself here, the old three R's!

The Lake School District is not perfect. We have to be better for our students and we have to continue to find the best possible ways to educate our kids. In the 2020-21 school year, we will be flipping our school day based on a year and a half of research that shows kids need more sleep. This has not been an easy sell for some of our parents but we believe it is our duty to provide every opportunity to make our kids successful. We think this will improve the academic progress of our population. We also have a group called Project Change that addresses and provides support for mental health and other social issues. This group is made up of staff members and community folks but also has its own student run organization. This collection of caring people work very well with our nationally acclaimed Students In Action club whose mission is to serve others.

To conclude my time, I'd like for the committee to consider our financial situation. We receive somewhere in the vicinity of \$3500 per student in state aid. In the current language of EdChoice, a student who chooses to leave us will receive \$6000 per year that we are responsible for paying. If a current 5th grader chooses to use the EdChoice voucher until he or she graduates it could have potentially devastating effects on a district like ours that has a per pupil spending amount that is significantly lower than the state average. We work hard to balance doing what is right by kids and being good stewards of the tax-payers' hard earned dollars. The current EdChoice program would make that balance much more difficult.

Chairman Jones and the 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 address your questions.



## EdChoice Testimony

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher Program. I am Monica Leppelmeier, Board Member of Lake Local Schools in Wood County, Ohio.

I am here today as a board member, but also as a parent of 2 soon to be 3 children in the Lake Local School District, a 2nd generation graduate of Lake Local Schools and a resident tax payer.

As you know, Ohio today uses the deduct method to fund performance-based EdChoice vouchers, which is fundamentally flawed. By inappropriately deducting aid from local school districts, it diverts locally-voted tax dollars to pay for private school vouchers. If the best interest of the students is what is driving these deductions from local public school districts, then there needs to be a way to ensure the private school is performing better than the public school the student is leaving. There needs to be a mechanism to hold the private schools accountable for the locally-voted property tax dollars they are receiving.

Lake Local Schools receives about \$3,500 per student from the state for their education, but if a high school student receives a voucher from the EdChoice program, they will receive up to \$6,000 from Lake Schools directly. Middle School students enrolled in the program would receive about \$4,600 from the district. This is showing that not only do we lose those money from the state for the students enrolled in the EdChoice program, but we then have to make up the difference with local tax dollars. Our taxpayers are then funding a student that is attending a private or parochial school that is not held to the same standards as the public school.

State leaders must put an end to laws that force public school districts and their taxpayers to pay for private school tuition. Ohio's EdChoice Program is having devastating effects on school districts.

Locally we are doing great things and providing an exceptional education to the students in our district. The Lake Local School District is continuously improving the teaching and learning that our students are receiving and we are seeing great success stories of student graduating and attending great colleges, joining a branch of the military or entering the workforce at one of our local companies. These are all testimonies to the faculty, staff and administration at Lake Local Schools. They work very hard to be good servants of the money received from both state and local resources to educate the students in our district.

I believe that we can all do better if all of us- legislators, educators and parents truly collaborate and develop a system that works for Ohio schools and Ohio students. All public school students in the Lake Local School District receive a great education regardless of their circumstances. Everyone works hard to educate and serve all students in the district at a low cost per pupil. A reduction in the funding received from the state for students not attending Lake Local Schools would not only hurt our current students but the community as well.

As I mentioned before, I am a parent to 3 wonderful children with 2 of them currently attending Lake Local Schools. As a parent I want nothing more than my children to receive a great education and go onto to live healthy and happy lives. I believe that this is started not only at home but at school. My daughter who has a learning disability does very well academically because of the education and services she is receiving at Lake. Managing her needs medically, academically and socially can be a handful but knowing the care that she is receiving while at school gives me peace of mind. I make the choice every day to send my children to Lake Local Schools and am very happy about it.

As I stand here before you as a board member, parent, graduate and resident I ask you to work on long term solutions to funding public schools and to come up with a mechanism that requires all schools who accept funding from the state to follow the same legal and legislative requirements.

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.



Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Jodi A. Takats, Ph.D., mother to four children who attend public schools and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Lake Local School District in Millbury, Ohio.

I am testifying today as an opponent of the proposed House plan, as I believe Ohio needs to take a closer look at solving the real issue at hand. I believe the current school testing and report card system is in need of a complete overhaul.

As parents, my husband and I prioritize our children's education and are very involved in the education that our children are receiving in public schools. It is essential that our children learn in an environment that is inclusive and accepting of diverse ideologies and values. My children have knowledgeable teachers who are not only specialized in teaching their specific academic content area, but also provide appropriate instructional design methodologies in their classrooms. We value the whole child philosophy that our public schools utilize to encompass critical thinking and discussion that our children can learn and grow from. These values are not measured with a single test score. You cannot "see" the quality of our children's education on a building or district report card. My children are taught to collaborate and engage with all types of learners in an educational setting that supports compassion and understanding from various perspectives. All students have the right to receive a quality education within a learning community that supports divergent thinking regardless of their abilities, disabilities, sexual orientation, and beliefs. I am proud to say that my children are receiving this type of top notch education at their public schools regardless of the report card rating.

In addition to being a dedicated parent, I am the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Lake Local School District in Millbury, Ohio. I am a 1995 graduate of this district. There is nowhere else that I would rather invest my energy as a professional. A significant portion of my life has been spent educating myself in the field of Education. I have earned a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education, a Master's degree in School Administration, a Specialist's degree in Special Education, and a Doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction/Gifted Education. Through these experiences, I have gained the knowledge that is necessary to value and appreciate all students and understand the wide array of possibilities of what a public education can offer to them. All students learn differently, and a one-size fits all model that is typically found in private/parochial schools is not what's best for students. This explains why many of our students return to the public school after a short period of time attending the private/parochial schools. Lake Local Schools does not turn any of our students away. We educate, we intervene, we put plans in place to assist all students in reaching their goals regardless of how it impacts our report cards. If anything, we spend more time focusing on

individual student growth and well being, than on the report card measures. Unfortunately, by putting students first, we risk being designated as "ineffective" on our building or district report cards.

Philosophically, I cannot convince myself that the "effectiveness" of our work and contribution to our students on a daily basis is determined from a score on a test. As educators, we work with each student to assist them in developing their goals to become strong individuals who can contribute as a productive member of society. Some of our students have no interest in being college-bound, therefore, why is test preparation so important for them? Their "effectiveness" should be determined from their chosen graduation pathway, not in the same manner as a student who plans to attend college.

Please examine how we measure our public schools. The current school testing and report card system needs your attention. A test score does not define who a student is or how the public school educates them. We welcome you to come and visit us at Lake Local Schools. We are proud of what we accomplish everyday with our students. Our students are proud to be Flyers, and many of us simply refuse to leave because our hearts are in this school district. We would love for you to come see it for yourselves.

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 address your questions.



Jodi A. Takats, Ph.D.