

To: The Ohio House of Representatives/Conference Committee Hearing on H.B. 9
From: Lynda Beichner/ Boardman Local School District Parent
Re: Testimony regarding the EdChoice Voucher System
Date: 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 Lynda Beichner, and I am a parent in the Boardman Local School District.

"Transforming lives through academics, athletics, and the arts." That is the mission statement of our Boardman Local Schools – encompassing 6 buildings and 4,000 students. Our administration and staff strive to educate and care for the whole student – while maintaining a safe environment in which to learn.

Students are supported and challenged academically across the spectrum, with individual needs being met through classes that range from a more basic level to advanced placement. Opportunities abound through our athletic department with three seasons of boys and girls team sports from club to varsity level. Artistic classes include orchestra, band, and choir – as part of our Grammy Signature School award winning music program. We also offer drama, the Boardman Spartan Television Network, and much, much more.

And all the while teachers, guidance counselors, and school resource officers are monitoring student social and emotional wellness. Positive behavior is reinforced, and when warranted, intervention with social workers and professional behavioral specialists is possible thanks to a partnership with local healthcare providers.

In short, our public-school employees are not just teaching Boardman's children, they are providing experiences and resources that help guide them toward a productive future.

They do this while working under the financial constraints of being a capped district. They do this while feeling undue pressure to teach to a test. And they do this in the face of two of our schools being newly designated as "failing schools" based on the most recent EdChoice criteria, despite both buildings receiving an overall grade of "C".

Having two of our buildings designated as EdChoice eligible was a blow we have yet to recover from. Our district has a well-established history of excellence that is now put into question by one subcategory on the state report card. While an overall grade of "C" demonstrates room for improvement, it does not mean "failing". And it certainly shouldn't mean that our local tax dollars may be taken from the public-school system to fund a private education which is not accountable via the same metrics.

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Our administration works diligently to be fiscally responsible and stretch every dollar – demonstrating accountability to our citizens to whom we must turn when funding is short. The current voucher legislation would take hundreds of thousands of dollars from our district. Dollars that could be invested in improving a school system that has already proven itself worthy.

I see these proceedings as an acknowledgement by the state legislature that the system of performance-based vouchers - and the state tests on which it is based - is flawed. I am hopeful that a reasonable judgement will be made to focus the voucher system on an income-based approach – if not permanently, then at least until student assessment is reconsidered and consistent for public and private schools.

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 try and answer any questions you may have.