



341 S. Nelson Avenue
Wilmington, OH 45177
phone: 937-382-1641, ext. 7485
fax: 937-382-1645
WilmingtonCitySchools.com

Melinda McCarty-Stewart
Superintendent

Melinda.McCarty-Stewart@Wilmington.k12.oh.us

February 20, 2020

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 Melinda McCarty-Stewart, superintendent of Wilmington City Schools.

Wilmington City Schools serves approximately 2,700 students from a community that has faced numerous societal and financial challenges, from the loss of DHL in 2008 to a rising opioid crisis and an overwhelmed foster-care system. As our community has struggled, it has impacted our schools. More than 50% of our students participate in the free and reduced lunch program, the number of foster or court placed students has risen sharply, and an increasing number of students are experiencing trauma and come to school in survival mode.

In spite of our challenges, our district continually works hard to meet the expectations laid out by the Ohio Department of Education as indicated on the Report Card. The tireless commitment of our staff, students and parents are often challenged when scores do not tell the whole story, but we do not shy away from the State Accountability.

In the 2018-2019 school year we formed a cohort team from our district to be trained in Trauma Informed Care. We now provide district wide training for all certified and classified staff on being a Trauma Responsive District. In the Spring of 2019, we trained every employee on Restorative Practices and we are committed to being a district that utilizes Restorative Practices.

The Wilmington School District is working diligently on the implementation of a focused and strong academic program PreK-12. I'll share just a few examples of our efforts for continuous improvement. Our high school is in its fourth year of providing six Advanced Placement courses that continue to maintain consistent enrollment from year to year. In our K-5 academic program we have committed to training every teacher in Teacher Directed Guided Reading, Phonemic Awareness and Math and Reading Fluency. We have invested in a comprehensive professional development with our staff on implementing best practices in improving student achievement. Our Middle School was awarded the School Quality Improvement Grant and this year we started our work around data informed decisions connected with our three year plan.

We recently transitioned our three elementary buildings from traditional neighborhood schools to grade level centers. This new structure is designed to allow all of our students to learn together regardless of their socio-economic status, providing more equity for our student learners.

As we continually struggle to adapt to community challenges and State report card changes, we find that with the expansion of EdChoice we may now be facing a financial crisis. If the current law stands, tax dollars will be pulled from currently attending students to pay for the private education of students who have never walked through our doors. In the next 4 years, the potential loss to our district would minimally be more than \$5 million dollars.

Our community has been working diligently to bring new businesses to our area to fill the void left after DHL pulled out. That will now be an uphill battle for our community, and many others across the state. The broken report card system has now indicated that 1200 of our public schools in the state are under-performing or failing. This is not a message that brings industry and jobs to a community, thus compounding the financial challenges of the public school system.

The staff, students, parents and community of Wilmington have demonstrated perseverance and loyalty through tough societal and financial challenges. We are a community that takes care of each other and prioritizes our children. We have pride in the many wonderful people and opportunities that exist in Wilmington. It is my hope that as State legislators you will follow that example. I ask that you recognize the value and importance of the public schools in Ohio that provide a free and accessible education for ALL children without discrimination; that you provide the support and funding that will allow public schools to flourish and grow, as we support the children of our communities.

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.