

To Whom It May Concern,

I write to you not only as an educator, but as an advocate for the 750+ members of the Parma Education Association, as a Department Chairperson for a team of high school English teachers, and as a parent. I have multiple concerns regarding the EdChoice program and its current methodology for awarding vouchers to students in Ohio. Those concerns range from a report card system that does not accurately reflect the current state of public education across Ohio to denigrating the working professionals I represent as the Vice President of the Parma Education Association.

My primary concern is that students who have never attended our schools are being given money to never attend our schools and that public tax dollars are being used to subsidize private education. It appears to those of us that work in public education that the opportunities available to all students across the state of Ohio through the public education system are being devalued (and by extension, the teachers who teach them) while the money that could go to sustain and further develop those programs is being given to private schools which are not held to the same level of accountability as publicly funded school districts. I further am concerned not only with the lack of accountability regarding a child's education at private schools but a lack of accountability as to how my tax dollars will be spent by those schools. As a taxpayer, I have a difficult enough time keeping track of how my tax dollars are spent by public institutions of all types that are subject to oversight. These schools are subject to almost none, and yet members of the state legislature seem content to bankrupt public school districts in favor of schools with little or no accountability regarding how prepared their students are for life after a k-12 education.

Additionally, it seems that my colleagues are yet again being used as a target of blame for factors well outside their control. Poverty is undeniably linked to a student's academic performance, and instead of addressing the poverty issue that affects over half a million of our children as of 2019 (according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Book), Ohio leaders would rather defund the schools these children are attending rather than give them the adequate resources to improve student lives as best they can. Our students come to school hungry, at times do not have a stable housing situation, often have parents working two jobs to meet minimum needs, and yet members of the Ohio House and Senate think that the best thing they can do for these children is give their parents a check to attend an unregulated school. Robbing Peter to pay Paul will not solve the larger issues that these children face outside of the one place where they often have the most stability, their local public school.

In closing, I implore you to reconsider the EdChoice program and its current system regarding vouchers and how they are awarded.

Norman Baker
Teacher
English Department Chair, Valley Forge High School
Vice President, Parma Education Association