

Chairman Don Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, thank you for allowing me to give testimony regarding the EdChoice Voucher Program and its possible impact on my district. I am Richard E. Bereschik, Superintendent of Wellsville Local Schools. I'm sure with this being the ninth session where testimony has been given, you may be a bit weary and have heard the same thing over and over. With that in mind, I will try to be brief.

To fully understand my point of view, you will need a little background on the Village of Wellsville and our school district. In 1976, when I began my career as an educator in the Wellsville City School System the city was thriving. We had two working potteries running three shifts and a brickyard that produced fire brick for the J&L Steel Mill in neighboring Midland. Main Street was bustling with business. We had multiple clothing stores, a five and dime, an Isaly's, a Western Auto, multiple restaurants, a car dealership, a lumber yard, with the list going on and on. The district had three elementary schools, a junior high school, and a high school. Student enrollment was around 1350 students.

Fast forward to February 20, 2020. The two potteries have been demolished. The brick yard is long gone. No five and dime store exists and no skyscraper ice cream cones can be bought at Isaly's. You can't buy a car in Wellsville nor can you purchase a stick of wood or a nail. Our student population is under 700. We have one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school.

The Wellsville Local School District is the largest employer in the Village, employing 102 staff members. In short, we are the hub of the community. Everything that is positive in the Village is related to the Wellsville Local School District.

I am now going to share some facts related to our financial status compared to other districts in the State. An article found in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (2019) entitled "Ranking every Ohio school district (adjusted for income) with 2019 report card grades" compared adjusted income with report card grades. Three categories stood out for Wellsville: child poverty rate, household income, and residents with at least a Bachelor's degree. Wellsville rated eleventh in the state with 47.8% of our pupils considered in the poverty range. Wellsville has the twelfth lowest medium household income of \$32,818. Wellsville is the fourteenth lowest in the state in regards to holding a Bachelor's degree with only 8.3% of our residents having at least a Bachelor's degree.

Some other factors you may find interesting about the Village of Wellsville and the Wellsville Local School District; one mill in Wellsville will generate approximately \$54,000, one of the lowest in the State of Ohio. One hundred percent of our students PK-12 receive a free lunch. We provide space and meals to three Head Start units free of charge. We have food and hygiene pantries in each of our buildings. Children are able to pick up food on an as needed basis. This program is funded through donations and The Second Harvest Food Bank of Mahoning County. In addition to the food pantries we hold a community food give away the third Saturday of each month from March through October. We have been averaging giving away 24,000 pounds of food on each Saturday in just two hours.

We have used our school safety monies to provide levels of security that most schools in the state do not have including a resource officer in each building. Thanks to Governor DeWine we have used our Student Wellness and Success Funding to hire a full time psychologist and a full

time licensed mental health professional. We are attempting to not only meet the educational needs of our students but also their social and emotional needs.

Now that you know a little bit about Wellsville, as Paul Harvey used to say “And now you know the rest of the story.” We may be financially poor as a district, but we sure are proud. We have graduates in all walks of life. We have graduates who are doctors, dentists, lawyers, Ivy League graduates, engineers, educators, tech workers, private contractors, oil and gas field workers, etc. We have two county judges who live in town and their children attend the Wellsville Local School District. The point is, we do an amazing job given the challenges we face. We are not currently on the EdChoice list according to our report card. However, if the economic poverty level is raised to 250% it could prove to be a fatal blow to my district. Regardless of what our report card grade is, a majority of my students will be eligible for the voucher.

Advocates of the voucher system are in the process of advertising; painting a rosy picture of what they will offer my students. Any of my students who leave will probably attend private schools in Steubenville, East Liverpool, or Columbiana. What stake will these institutions have in my village? Will they provide for the needs of not only the students but the community as a whole? I think not.

In closing I’m asking for the same things many LEAs are asking for. Rather than reinvent the wheel, I am requesting that you do the following as stated in at least one other district today.

- I ask the committee to make the recommendation(s) that do the same for any institution that utilizes the Ohio Taxpayer’s dollars for educational purposes.
- Establish accountability and standards for all educational systems and apply the same rules to follow in order to use public dollars for the purpose of education of Ohio citizens.
- Re-tool our current accountability system that measures all institutions that are funded by the public under current law.
- And lastly, do not reduce our revenues established for the students who live in our districts.

Furthermore, as you make recommendations concerning EdChoice please take into consideration that in many small districts like my own, you may not only be dismantling an education system you will be dismantling a whole community.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, it has been my pleasure to provide input regarding the EdChoice Voucher Program. As this legislation moves forward please keep in mind the fate of communities like Wellsville. If our towns lose their schools, they lose their identities.

Exner, A. “Ranking every Ohio school district (adjusted for income) with 2019 report card grades.” *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*. N.p., 24 Sept. 2019. Web. 18 Feb. 2020