

Springfield City School District

H.B. 9

Written Testimony

Robert F. Hill, Ed.D.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 Conference Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program. I am Dr. Bob Hill, Superintendent of the Springfield City School District.

The Springfield City School District (SCSD) is located in the City of Springfield in Clark County. Our city of approximately 60,000 residents has faced tough times over the years with the end of the manufacturing boom. Our District serves approximately 7,700 students in grades PK-12, which ranks us as the 27th largest school district in Ohio per FY19 Ohio Department of Education (ODE) data.

SCSD is a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school district, meaning that 100% of our students qualify for free breakfast and lunch. According to the ODE, the Springfield City School District has the 16th lowest median adjusted gross income of the 607 school districts in Ohio. Further, we serve approximately 400 homeless students from birth to grade 12.

The Springfield City School District lost \$2,030,374.70 in FY19 to EdChoice Scholarships and will lose an estimated \$11,748,965.00 over the next five years. This is \$11 million that could be used by the District to change the lives of thousands of students, yet it is instead funneled to mostly private religious institutions that selectively enroll students, receive public tax dollars, then send back the students with disabilities or students that do not meet their preconceived mold or are difficult to serve. Most importantly, these institutions are not held to the same standards as our far superior public schools.

The Springfield City School District serves every student regardless of gender, race, or disability. We take in all students, even when they are expelled from the private institutions that are unable to serve them. We are home to thousands of needy students and our doors are always open to them.

One might ask why is all of this background information necessary? The simple answer to the question is that SCSD is labeled as a failing urban school district, as defined by the fatally flawed Ohio Department of Education Report Card, yet we are not failing.

You see, life is a bit different in an urban school district. Of course, there is the occasional popcorn sale or t-shirts sold for a benefit walk. But our sense of community is much deeper. Recently, SCSD partnered with a non-profit organization out of the Dayton, Ohio area who provided thousands of new shoes to students in our District. To make this event a success, the SCSD nurses, led by our lead nurse, coordinated hundreds of community and internal volunteers to unload the shoes off of the trucks, measure little feet, jog around the gymnasium being silly to make children laugh and smile, making sure the shoes fit, and ending the day in tears of joy, having been a part of the experience. These events were not just a bake sale, these events were **Above and Beyond**. These events touched the lives of our students, adults, football players, the MJROTC class, elected officials, and countless others.

It does not end there. When one is truly committed to the community in which one lives or works, **Above and Beyond** happens naturally. The stories build from the bond made between students and teachers, as well as parents/guardians with school Administrators. Upon learning of two young, male students who were sharing a couch to slumber in the evenings, an SCSD team of teachers arrived with bunk beds before bedtime that same day, delivering joy and healthy living alternatives to a dear family. When we see a family arrive in a car with more children than car seats, we seek assistance from public entities who provide free boosters and infant car seats by the time the students are picked up at the end of the school day. **Above and Beyond**.

Over the holiday break, our SHS Girls Basketball team spent many hours serving at the local Soup Kitchen, meanwhile a director of a program full of afterschool high school students, developed a partnership with an agency who agrees to provide healthy snacks to feed students who will not get a meal at home that evening. **Above and Beyond** is finding sponsors who support the creation of an outside learning laboratory for students at one of our ten elementary schools.

Above and Beyond, the Springfield way, includes teaching a student how to build a bicycle, then presenting it back to them, knowing that they need it for transportation to get to a new internship that we assisted the student in obtaining. **Above and Beyond** is turning a small classroom into a clothing “store” where students can take home clothes for themselves, as well as siblings and parents/guardians at no cost.

Some of our students are self-led, securing funding for a guest speaker to bring suicide awareness and anti-bullying efforts to the entire high school because the need is real. **Above and Beyond**.

Above and Beyond means we are showing up on your doorstep when you missed school for the fourth time. Our intention may not be to discipline at that time, but to provide tough love because we knew your Dad and your Grandpa and your Great Grandpa. And we know that they want you to succeed.

We are Springfield. We go **Above and Beyond** with an unmatched sense of pride. We fill a stadium or a gymnasium and we make noise, because your Mom played, your Grandma played, your Great-Grandma played and we make certain that if you are giving it your all, we will be there with you every step of the way.

We celebrate the winning of a GWOC title the same as a Mock Trial Competition. We offer five foreign languages and a new School of Innovation that provides a PBL learning hybrid model for students who learn best in a hands-on, non-traditional environment. In addition, our high school provides International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, and College Credit Plus Courses.

Our students are reaching heights **Above and Beyond**, as well. Our alumni are successful and willing to assist current SHS students to succeed. In recent years, we have noted alumni who are surgeons, lawyers, White House liaisons and even a recent graduate who truly is a rocket scientist! Our Division I athletic programs allow for success in collegiate sports as well. We enjoy Saturday afternoons watching SCSD graduates play in the Big 10 and SEC Conferences, or most recently, watching a grad play football for Army while attending West Point. **Above and Beyond** and our success can be measured in many ways - from providing new shoes - to alumni rocket scientists.

Public education is the key to the future of our great state and EdChoice will further divide educators and hurt our students. I ask you to provide a solution that continues to allow SCSD to go **Above and Beyond** for our most deserving students.

I must reiterate that state funding of private and often religious-based education, that is not held to the same standards as public school education, is problematic from the perspective of creating a level-playing field. If it is the desire of the legislature to fund private education, a stance that I disagree with, I suggest holding everyone to the same rules, regulations, and performance standards.

In addition, I believe that the final solution or fix should provide the elimination of performance based vouchers and no expansion of income-based vouchers via expanded eligibility based on income levels. I might suggest that a fix to the fatally flawed report card system come sooner than later, which would address many issues.

In closing and as you are aware, Ohio currently uses the deduct method to fund performance-based EdChoice vouchers, which is fundamentally flawed. By inappropriately deducting aid from local districts, locally-voted tax dollars are diverted to pay for vouchers, which ultimately harms public school districts and students.

A better approach is found within the House plan, which requires the state to fund these vouchers. In my professional opinion, if the state is going to issue vouchers, the state should pay for them, not perpetuate the use of a shell game to prop them up with locally-voted property taxes.

Chairman Jones and members of the House Bill 9 conference committee, I thank you for this opportunity to provide input regarding Ohio's EdChoice Voucher program.

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