

Testimony on EdChoice Vouchers

HB 9 Conference Committee

Thursday, February 20, 2020

Zachary Jones, Teacher Mansfield City Schools

Chairman Jones and Members of the Conference Committee,

I stand before you in order to share a unique perspective. As someone who attended a private, Catholic school from grades K-6 and attended a public school from grades 7-12, I have a unique understanding of being a student of both services. I can go on about my first time learning about the human genome and how that ignited a spark of curiosity that's still burning strong, or about the time I read *The Birds*, by Daphne du Maurier, and learned that what might appear to be a horror story about murderous birds, can also have a deeper meaning. It could symbolize, for example, a critical moment in society.

I could stand here and go on about my life-changing moments growing up in a public school, and how my time spent there I was surrounded by adults who had, not only my best interest, but everyone's best interest informing their decisions. No, I'm here to offer the unique perspective of having taught in both a parochial school and a public school. I'm a 7th grade science teacher at Mansfield City Schools in Mansfield, Ohio—a district that serves *all* students.

After I graduated High School, I went off to the military. I joined the military after watching my father, a 22 year military veteran. During the six years I was enlisted in the Air Force, I continued to build upon the values that I learned in public education. Values like empathy, equity, and basic humanity. Everything we did was subject to oversight and regulation by the Air Force and United States Federal Government. We followed the rules and did our best to uphold those values I just mentioned.

Then, I decided to become a teacher. I was open to teaching in any type of school because I wanted a job, so I accepted a job in a parochial school. I am not here to defame this school, so I will not share their name. I don't need to tear others down in order to show the value of my position. However, I can tell you without reservation that parochial and private schools do not serve all students and, because of their lack of accountability, fall far short when they claim to serve all students. In my work in a parochial school, being left out of critical decisions that involved students prevented the students from being served as whole people. I, the person who interacted with the student the most, was never consulted when it came time for new IEP goals, the very tool we in education use to try and bridge the gaps between our special education students and our general education students. I wasn't in a place that shared my previously mentioned value system.

As soon as I was able, I left that school, which had many other problems related to the lack of accountability. This is when I arrived at Mansfield City Schools in Mansfield, Ohio. Others who have testified have characterized Mansfield as “failing”. They have said they don’t want their child going to certain schools in my district because they are afraid of my students and of the excellent educational environments that my colleagues foster. I was not going to testify, but we in Mansfield are done with being kicked around.

I’m finally home in a place that shares those values. You’re welcome to drive by any of our buildings after school hours. The parking lots won’t look much different than they do during school hours. My colleagues work tirelessly to ensure all students, without reservation, are receiving the quality education they deserve. The majority of the community Mansfield City Schools serves, comes from poverty, neighborhoods that struggle, I can talk about how I’ve had multiple kids have to call 911 because a parent had overdosed, or many that go hungry at home, or return to a homeless shelter when they leave us at 2:40.

Reality categorizes many of our students as disadvantaged. To rob our community, and communities across Ohio, the right to a quality education is an affront to those values I see taught at our school every day. To give that public funding to private entities, that don’t share our values of equity and a service to all people. To allow communities to suffer because that money went to entities that are able to only serve the privileged is embarrassing and disheartening. It sends a message that the majority of Ohio’s children don’t matter enough.

Under current statutes, parochial schools can operate in a way that is tantamount to discrimination. If a child’s educational journey is deemed to be “too burdensome” they can simply “unload” them back into a public system that this body has already taken money from in the first place. These discriminatory practices are antithetical to what public education stands for. These discriminatory practices also unfairly target already disadvantaged children in not only Mansfield, but throughout Ohio.

Just like in *The Birds*, this is a critical moment in society for Ohio’s children. SB 89, as passed by the House, is the best plan put forward for saving districts like mine from the detrimental impact of performance-based vouchers on my students, my colleagues, my district, and my community. I urge you to support SB 89.