

Testimony in Opposition to Sub. H.B. No. 200
Ohio House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Career Readiness
November 28, 2017

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Committee:

I am Eric Resnick, a member of the Canton City School District Board of Education. I am the board's Legislative Liaison and Student Achievement Liaison.

For the purpose of disclosure, my testimony in opposition to Sub. H.B. No. 200 is in that capacity. As a board, the Canton City Schools Board of Education has taken no action on the legislation.

The Canton City School District is one of Ohio's venerable urban school districts which offers *all* students, regardless of their situation, comprehensive academics, a full range of community and technical education, advanced placement, a full range of special education services, world class extra-curricular activities, arts and athletics, credit recovery opportunities that are second-to-none, and a nationally top ranked Early College Academy.

We do all that and more for *all* students and their families, regardless of the parents' capacity to participate in their child's education, their income, where they live, their religion or lack thereof, their sexual orientation, their disabilities, whether they have been incarcerated, whether or not they speak English as a first language, or where they were born.

Like all of Ohio's urban districts, the Canton City School District is diverse across just about every demographic, and we are far and away the most diverse school district in our area.

Approximately 10 percent of our students will be homeless this year based on McKinney-Vento standards, and they attend class beside those who live in historic mansions in Ridgewood and gated communities in Myers Lake. More than 85 percent of our students live in poverty, and 100 percent of our students get free breakfast and lunch. We have entire buildings where the students get backpacks of food to take home over the weekends so they can eat.

In my neighborhood the fastest growing demographic is immigrants whose children don't speak English at home and need compensating strategies at school.

So, how do we do?

I am probably the district's biggest critic. Just ask the superintendent. But because of our capacity and our size, which allows us to serve needs, our graduation rate this year is 80.2 percent, and we have graduates in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in this nation, as well as community colleges, apprenticeships, and even those who are entrepreneurs. Our students do not feel entitled, and they have learned that they have to work twice as hard for half as much credit because of where they came from. They develop grit and character. I would never bet against a Canton City School District graduate in the game of life.

And as a public school district, we act in a very public way.

My four Board of Education colleagues and I are elected by the public. The entire district and all its

employees operate under Ohio's "Sunshine" Laws. Our books are open. We seek public involvement, and sometimes get more of it than is in our comfort zone. It's all about being accountable and transparent.

Across the state 91 percent of students are educated in public school districts like ours.

Sub. H.B. No. 200 is so dangerous because it threatens public school districts' ability to do what we do, openly, for **all**, and with a high degree of public accountability.

I know that all of you understand economies of scale. When we talk about businesses that produce things, all of you, I know, can give chapter and verse about fixed costs and the positive effects of volume. It's why your smart phone went down in price as they became more popular.

Yet many of you, and probably for partisan ideological reasons, don't seem to understand that when Mr. Smith's fourth grade at Youtz Elementary School loses a student to a for-profit charter school, our costs to run Mr. Smith's classroom does not decrease.

The education privatization ideologues know full well, but hide the fact that appropriation of the 100 students to make a for-profit school minimally viable does not reduce the public school district's costs by the same amount. I would argue that as one of the reasons why Sub. H.B. No. 200 costs \$48 million. The Canton City School District operates 13 elementary schools. 100 students divided by 13 schools is potentially less than 8 students per school. We can't close an elementary school that loses 8 students, but the \$48,000 out of each school's budget certainly cuts into each school's capacity to serve students.

That's one of the dirty little secrets proponents of privatization of education don't want you to know, though I suspect many of you do anyway.

Another is that the Canton City School District outperforms all of the for-profit charters and religious schools that operate within our district's borders.

And while the Canton City School District, like all public school districts, is present, reliable and accountable year in and year out, the for-profit charters fly by night. Every year a number of them come and go. It's a game. For-profit operators know that they can escape accountability for two years. So there are for-profit charter schools run two years, then disappear, only to be replaced by another, often in the same building.

And this legislature has made sure that all this is legal and prosperous. And since nothing in this bill changes any of that, we all know if this bill opens the money gates to profiteers even more, exactly what's in store for Ohio's students and their families, so please don't defile your dignity by acting surprised.

How is it that these schools recruit? Well, if you have ever been hustled for time shares, you know.

These schools employ recruiters who are trained to prey on the vulnerable. That's why they are so prolific in distressed communities. They lie to parents, and make promises no accountable public school district ever would, nor could. As an example, I share the story of a new for-profit charter opening in downtown Canton that promised prospects a college education.

That school disappeared under a cloud of scandal after two years, but not before doing significant damage.

We know what happened because many of those students came back to the Canton City School District, and parents told us what the for-profit school said to win them in the first place.

Another for-profit in Canton which was down the street from where I live was one of the most predatory and vociferous liars of the bunch. When they got into trouble, they closed up shop and now a new operator is in the same building.

Education profiteers and those who support them here falsely claim they are public schools. They are not. Just because they say so or people down here say so, doesn't make it so.

They are **businesses** with all the legal structure of protection businesses enjoy. We see that clearly with ECOT. Their governing bodies are **private**. No one gets elected to them, and their obligation is not to the public. Their meetings are not public. Want to know what they are up to with public money? Sorry, the open records laws don't apply to them.

Worse, they say they don't, but they do **cherry pick** students. They do it, not outwardly, rather because they can. Students who "don't work out," or whose parents don't meet participation requirements, or whose behaviors become inconvenient can be sold the door, too. And we know that because as a public school district, we welcome them back with open arms, even if they are expensive to educate.

Religious schools, of course, can be even less inclusive, and this bill's voucher provisions are a bonanza for them.

Support of this path for Ohio's education resources can only be credited to politics over reality. Public school districts can't make political contributions.

But let me go a little deeper.

Size matters. When we are talking about educational opportunities, it is a district's capacity that allows it to create opportunity for students.

About half a dozen years ago the Canton City School District launched a middle school dedicated to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. We added Arts and Medicine to the mix and call it our STEAMM Academy. It is a school of choice, and STEAMM Academy students do really cool stuff that district capacity allows.

For example, this Spring, STEAMM Academy represented the state of Ohio at the Electric Vehicle Grand Prix in Washington, D.C., racing an electric vehicle they designed and built themselves. (I got to drive it around a track at our district's Family Fun Day, and I have to tell you it's a kick!)

How did they do?

Well, they were the only middle school team in the competition running against high school teams, and they finished third!

Size and capacity matter when you're creating educational opportunity.

We're the largest school district in the county, and at the time we created STEAMM Academy, our neighbor, which is a suburban district, but still the second largest in the county, was only able to add a STEM program to their middle school.

STEM program vs. entire STEAMM school.

Size matters. Capacity matters.

If you care about education and the success of Ohio's students, if you are honest, you have to care about these things.

School districts cannot meet the needs of their students and their families without capacity. School districts cannot be innovative, nor can we meet the needs of our graduates in the 21st Century economy unless we have capacity and slack.

Just look around at what has happened to public school districts that have lost that capacity.

Sub. H.B. No. 200 does **nothing** but threaten that capacity, putting public school districts at risk of failure for our communities, which is a high price for them to pay to break public school teachers unions. Don't you agree?

One only has to learn education history to realize the second problem with privatization as a policy.

Following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling making segregated public schools illegal, the first charter schools appeared in Prince Edward County, Virginia.

After holding off desegregation for five years, in 1959, the county literally closed all of its public schools while allowing individuals and organizations, including churches, to open charter schools funded by the diverted public money, which remained segregated. They called those schools "public," too.

One of my heroes in this debate is Diane Ravitch.

Ravitch is a professor of education at New York University. She was also a deputy secretary of education under George H.W. Bush, and was responsible for setting the nation on a path of increased privatization of public education under the guise of "school choice."

Because Ravitch is honest, she now crusades against what she did 30 years ago, calling it a "colossal mistake." Ravitch uses data, science and facts to tell all of us she and her colleagues made a mistake – a costly mistake – and begs policy makers to reverse it.

These so-called reforms through vouchers and transferring public money to private hands was conceived by economists, not educators, and Ravitch tells that story very honestly.

"Billionaires like privately managed schools. Parents are lured with glittering promises of getting their kids a sure ticket to college. Politicians want to appear to be champions of 'school reform' with charters," Ravitch wrote.

Adding, "But charters will not end the poverty at the root of low academic performance or transform our nation's schools into a high-performing system. The world's top-performing systems - Finland and Korea, for example - do not have charter schools. They have strong public school programs with well-prepared, experienced teachers and administrators. Charters and that other faux reform, vouchers, transform schooling into a consumer good, in which choice is the highest value."

Ravitch continues, "The campaign to "reform" schools by turning public money over to private corporations is a great distraction from our system's real problems: Academic performance is low where

poverty and racial segregation are high. Sadly, the U.S. leads other advanced nations of the world in the proportion of children living in poverty. And income inequality in our nation is larger than at any point in the last century.”

In that article Ravitch concludes, “ Our nation is heading in a perilous direction, toward privatization of education, which will increase social stratification and racial segregation. Our civic commitment to education for all is eroding. But like police protection, fire protection, public beaches, public parks and public roads, the public schools are a public responsibility, not a consumer good.”

Ravitch points out what happens in places like Los Angeles, Detroit, and Chicago, where privatization has run amok, and the public has lost control of its schools, and is now stuck with low performing unaccountable charters and voucher schools and public schools so drained of capacity that they cannot recover.

Ohio is already known as the “Wild, Wild West of Charter Schools,” and that's by charter school proponents.

Why in the world would you want to take Ohio even farther, faster down this failed policy path?

Aren't headlines like the January 7, 2016 *Columbus Dispatch* saying: “**Ohio schools slide in national rankings**” enough of an embarrassment for you?

The article documents that Ohio's schools as a whole, including the charters and vouchers schools you like, fell from 5th nationally to 23rd in six years.

I would argue that these results show how our state's policies have failed, specifically correlated almost exactly to the accelerated shifting of education resources from public school districts to the private entities by this legislative body.

If a public school district showed that kind of decline correlated to that kind of ideological stupidity, you all would pass a law to take us over and shut us down.

But for some crazy reason, here we are asking you not to do this kind of damage that many of you are hell bent on doing.

This legislation needs to be voted down on merit. It's bad policy. It does damage to the whole.

Instead, please focus on what will actually improve public education in Ohio. It would be nice to be ranked 5th again.

I will gladly take questions.



