



Interested Party Testimony  
House Bill 166 (Operating Budget FY 2020-2021)  
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Chairman Terhar, Vice Chairwoman Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, my name is Kevin Bacon, and I am the President & CEO of School Choice Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 166.

School Choice Ohio (SCO) is a statewide organization that educates parents on the education options available for their children and advocates for the expansion of quality education options for every Ohio child. We work to empower families to choose the best learning environment for their children, whether it's traditional public school, private school, charter school, or through virtual or blended learning or homeschooling.

There are approximately 1.7 million students in Ohio public schools (traditional and charter schools). There are 170,000 students in private schools, of which 46,000 students are using scholarships, and there are 30,000 home schooled students. Today, I will address two topics regarding these student populations: school choice scholarships and state report cards.

### **School Choice Programs**

Ohio has five, state-funded, private school scholarship programs:

- Autism Scholarship, for any student with autism;
- Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship, for any student with special needs;
- Cleveland Scholarship & Tutoring Program, for any student assigned to the Cleveland Metropolitan School District;
- EdChoice Scholarship Program, for students assigned to or attending a designated public school;
- Income-based (EdChoice Expansion), for students in grades K-6 whose family income is under 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.

The Income-Based (EdChoice Expansion) scholarship, is funded through a line-item appropriation and is being phased-in over time. Each year, a new grade level of students is eligible. The demand for this program is high. In fact, each year, there are more applicants than there are scholarships available. SCO supports the continued phase-in of this program as proposed in HB 166, which adds sixth grade this fall and seventh grade in the 2020-21 school year.

### **Report Cards**

While the House continues working on HB 166, I would like to address some of the report card proposals currently being discussed. These proposals mirror the “safe harbor” provisions passed in previous general assemblies, and they greatly reduce accountability and arbitrarily raise school performance. In many instances, the proposals remove the requirement to use both Performance Index and Value-added measures to calculate school performance. The Performance Index is one of the measures used for the Achievement component, and it shows how well each student at a school is doing, based on state tests. The Value-added measure is used in the Progress component, and it is an evaluation of academic growth for all students. Performance Index is about how many students have passed the test, whereas Value-added is about how much growth each student makes.

Using only one of these measures is a setback for our students and misses the full picture needed to evaluate whether our students are receiving the education they need. Rather than arbitrarily changing the accountability measures, the state needs to determine why scores on measures like Performance Index and Value-added grades are low and take meaningful steps to help students improve and increase academic achievements.

Additionally, the proposed report card changes reinstate the prohibition of using this data to determine whether a school is subject to certain sanctions and penalties. One of these so-called sanctions is providing students at a low-performing school the option to use an EdChoice Scholarship. The EdChoice Scholarship is Ohio’s performance-based scholarship, where students are only eligible if the public school they are assigned to or attending meets certain performance criteria. Providing students with the opportunity to use an EdChoice Scholarship is not a punishment and should not be categorized as a sanction on schools. Thousands of Ohio

families are using the EdChoice Scholarship because they know their children need a different learning environment, and limiting the availability of this option through these types of changes is harmful to these students. If there are changes needed for the state report cards, this ought to be done outside of the budget, in stand-alone legislation.

### **Conclusion**

House Bill 166 provides an opportunity for Ohio to improve education for all students. As you move forward with the budget, I ask that you ensure that any education policy changes are in the best interest of all of Ohio's students.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.