

I am Mike Fluhart, Principal of Shepherd Christian School in Gahanna. I am a school choice advocate. I will admit I am partial to Christian education, yes, but over my 25 years in education, I have always put the student and family's desires first. I have embraced students and families that enroll in my school. I have supported homeschool families. When my school could not meet the needs of the student and the local public school or another private school could meet that student's needs, I have both encouraged and worked with families to enroll in the school that provided the student the best opportunity to be successful.

I have taught and work in Nonpublic, public, and non-for-profit Chartered schools. Over my years, I have seen a significant shift in parent involvement in their child's education. Unfortunately to many parents have walked away from their duty. This shift in responsibility to educate the child is one of the most significant factors impacting, negatively, on the success of this generation of students. For decades it was the family's responsibility to educate the child, with formal education being one tool. Not the only tool.

I know many public school teachers represented here today, asking anyone in the classroom how much time is dedicated to non-curriculum activities—dealing with issues that should have been dealt with at home. Those duties and tasks that the family use to assume responsibility for. I am sure you are asking where he is going and what this has to do with Ed Choice. Ed Choice helps put the educational burden back on the family.

There are many Pros and some cons to the Ed Choice program. One of the biggest pros is the flexibility it provides families, traditionally families coming from underperforming schools, freedom and the flexibility they need to make the best decision for their child. Many have experienced what their local public school has to offer, and they want more for their child. They see the numbers, pre-pandemic 45% of the average 4th grader in not reading at grade level, or experience 30 plus kids in a classroom.

Research has shown the biggest plus to school vouchers is the long-term effect they have on the child. Students/families that have utilized vouchers tend to have higher graduation rates and higher college enrollment. I contend that success is the by-product of the partnership between the family and school. Families that invest in the educational process see education as a lifelong skill. Students see themselves as lifelong learners.

I want to talk a little about one of the Cons: the current voucher rate-K-6 \$4650.00 7-12 \$6,000. Let me tell you a little about Shepherd Christian. We are a K-6th grade school. We currently have 176 students enrolled. Our tuition is 5,600.00 a year. 73% of our families take advantage of Ed Choice program. Of that 73%, 53% are Ed Choice Expansion based upon their income. Hence, we educate our students for less than a 1/3 of what our peers in the public schools are. I only point this out for two reasons. I have testified before, and one of the points a Representative brought up was that we don't accept everyone. That is true, it is not out of desire, but the reality is we can not meet the needs of every student. Our heart is for **every** student to be successful, not possible in a small school on less than 5,000 a year.

I have also heard that private schools take the best and brightest and that Ed Choice vouchers enable this. That is a myth. Not just in my school, which the demographics are similar to area school. But national research shows that it is not the case.

Our heart is to provide the education our families desire and the one the kids deserve. But I will admit it at the current rate. It is a challenge.

To close, I could give you several success stories that are directly tied to a student's ability to come to our school because of Ed Choice, that they would not have been able to without the assistance. But I will leave you with one.

Austin came to our school two years ago; he and his mom struggled to make ends meet, and housing was even an issue. Mom knew that Austin needed more than he had been getting. Academically Austin was one to two years behind his peers and struggled socially. Over the last two years, Austin has blossomed. Academically last year, he met the standard for the 3rd-grade guarantee, and socially he is making friends in class, and I recently watched him make his "Science Fair" presentation. A year ago, that would not have happened. We are small and offer very few scholarships; without Ed Choice, that young man would have still been last in a 30 something classroom.

Thank you for your time.