



House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 11 Testimony
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio Association of School Business Officials
Ohio School Boards Association

Chairman Bird, Vice Chairwoman Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill (HB) 11. My name is Paul Imhoff with the Buckeye Association of School Administrators. Joining me in answering your questions are Katie Johnson with the Ohio Association of School Business Officials and Jennifer Hogue with the Ohio School Boards Association. Collectively, our organizations represent public school superintendents, school board members, treasurers/CFOs and other school business officials from around the state. On behalf of our members, we are testifying in opposition to HB 11.

As you know, HB 11 would create the Backpack Scholarship Program, under which all students in Ohio – including those already attending a private school or in a homeschool setting – would be eligible to receive a state-paid voucher totaling \$5,500 or \$7,500 to subsidize their private school tuition or educational costs. Unlike the current scholarship programs that restrict the use of the vouchers to private school tuition, HB 11 would also permit students enrolled in nonchartered nonpublic schools or in a home education setting to receive the state-paid voucher for reimbursable educational costs, thus creating two new schooling types for which the state must now provide funding. The Legislative Service Commission projects the magnitude of HB 11's changes to be \$1.3 billion annually beginning in fiscal year 2025.

Our members have long been champions of choice options within our public schools. In addition to the unique and innovative educational programming for students in our traditional public school buildings, below are some examples of our members' efforts to provide additional options to students and families:

- our members offer all students enrollment in the state's 49 career centers, as well as career-technical education curriculum within our traditional district schools.
- our members operate 52 of the state's 78 STEM- and STEAM-designated schools.
- our members sponsor 91 of the state's 334 community schools, nine of the state's 77 dropout prevention community schools, and four of the state's 16 e-schools.
- 550 of our member districts offer either interdistrict or intradistrict open enrollment to

students and their families.

- 70,597 students in public schools earned high school and college credit through the College Credit Plus program in the 2020-21 school year, according to the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

As you can see, choice and competition are inherent and plentiful within our public schools, and we are proud to provide these diverse options to students and families. The success of these programs is rooted in strong, stable funding and robust accountability measures, which is why we have concerns about some features of this legislation.

Before I move on, I want to again stress that we are not against choice, and we are not here to advocate in opposition to choice. However, prior to considering an expansion of this magnitude, we believe the state should fully fund the more than 80% of Ohio's children who attend a traditional public school.

After that is achieved, such an expansion should only occur if we truly provide parents with an informed and transparent choice. All parents want to make the best choice for their child, but that is not possible without a common set of data that provides a true, apples-to-apples comparison of the educational quality and financial accountability of the school options available to their family – both public and private. Addressing this would ensure parents are fully equipped with the knowledge and resources to appropriately and objectively decide the best school for their family. It would also assist policymakers and the public in understanding how their tax dollars are being spent.

Currently, Ohio provides exemptions¹ from state testing and graduation requirements for scholarship students attending chartered nonpublic schools. These exemptions allow students to bypass the Ohio State Tests and graduation seals system if their school administers an “alternative standardized assessment” from a menu of tests. For many students in those schools without a scholarship, there are no state testing or state graduation requirements.

HB 11 maintains these exemptions, but also reduces the frequency of the administration of the elementary tests to occur “at least every other year,” and allows each school to select its own tests. Scholarship students in private high schools would still be subject to annual state testing and graduation requirements, but the existing exemptions would continue to apply. The aggregate results of these assessments will be published and provided to students’ parents upon their request.

These provisions will prevent parents and the public from having transparent and consistent information across school settings, especially when comparing a public school to a private school or even a private school against another private school. Therefore, we believe HB 11 should enact similar accountability and reporting mechanisms to better equip parents and

¹ <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Ohio-Education-Options/Private-Schools/Chartered-Nonpublic-School-Information/2023-Chartered-Nonpublic-Schools-Testing-and-Graduation-Requirements-002.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

ensure that taxpayer funds are being used appropriately.

Finally, a universal voucher expansion will place strains on our already burdened pupil transportation system. We urge lawmakers to consider the complexity of this issue and implement solutions that result in all students being served.

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, we stand here today not in opposition to choice, but, rather, in support of parents. If the state intends to expand vouchers universally, we believe the state must first fully fund our public schools and then establish academic and financial safeguards to provide parents with the fully transparent information necessary to choose the best education for their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on House Bill 11. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.