



House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 407 Proponent Testimony
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
May 21, 2024

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony to House Bill (HB) 407, which makes essential improvements to Ohio's scholarship programs in the interest of parents and families through academic and fiscal oversight enhancements. My name is Paul Imhoff, director of governmental relations for the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA), Ohio's school superintendents' association.

I'd like to begin by saying that BASA and its members have supported choice options within the public-school marketplace for decades, as evidenced by our 49 career centers, 52 STEM-designated schools, 91 district-sponsored community schools, nine district-sponsored dropout prevention community schools, four district-sponsored e-schools, and 550 open enrollment school districts. Clearly, we do not oppose school choice. What we are in favor of is strong schools for children. Our purpose here today is in support of parents and strong schools.

Better Information for Parents

As a result of changes last year from the state operating budget, all students in Ohio – regardless of their family income – are eligible for a taxpayer-funded scholarship to attend a private school. Parents now have more educational opportunities than ever for their children, but the state has yet to supply them with all the necessary tools to make an informed decision when evaluating all their new and existing options. We believe that the data on private school quality and the timeline by which that data is published is incomparable, untimely, and inaccessible. To address those issues, HB 407 implements essential improvements to the scholarship system to assist parents and policymakers.

First, due to the inconsistencies and differences of the tests administered to scholarship students in private schools, parents are unable to objectively compare the academic performance of private schools against public schools and private schools against other private schools. Since 2019, scholarship students have been able to bypass the Ohio State Tests for an

“alternative assessment,” which means that the existing academic performance data does not allow for an apples-to-apples comparison of school quality across school types. While maintaining test exemptions for non-scholarship students, HB 407 provides parents and the public access to a common set of rich test data that provides a true, apples-to-apples comparison of the educational quality of the school options available to their family – both public and private. Addressing this ensures parents are fully equipped with the knowledge and resources to appropriately and objectively decide the best school for their family.

Second, Ohio publishes the limited test data it has on scholarship students in an untimely manner on February 1 each year – nearly nine months after the end of the school year and more than four months after public school test data are published on September 15. HB 407 requires the test data to be published on the same date as public schools, creating a level-playing field for parents and the public to evaluate the academic performance of *all schools* at the *same time*.

Third, the state test data are not easily located on the Department of Education and Workforce’s (DEW) website, nor are they easy to navigate and compare against other schools. Public schools have a simple access point: reportcard.education.ohio.gov. Shouldn’t parents have a one-stop shop on school quality for *all schools* in the *same place* with the *same level of detail and information*? HB 407 requires DEW to establish a system that compares student performance data of scholarship students with the performance data for public school students in the same school district. This builds on last year’s change in the operating budget that requires a student growth measure component be created for scholarship students in grades 4-8.

Together, these essential improvements will better assist parents in understanding the quality of their public and private school options.

Fiscal Oversight

Ohio is projected to spend nearly \$1.3 billion next year in total state support to private schools through scholarships, administrative cost reimbursements, and auxiliary services payments. As awareness and demand of the universal EdChoice Expansion program grow, that figure is likely to increase greatly over time. Therefore, it is in the public interest that there be a better understanding of the use and performance of these taxpayer funds. This will assist policymakers in further refining the program, mitigate financial mismanagement, and ensure funds are being used as intended. To address those items, HB 407 requires private schools that enroll scholarship students to annually submit state expenditure reports.

Chair Manning and members of the committee, I stand here today not in opposition to choice, but, rather, in support of parents. As Ohio nears the first full year of universal school choice, it is

imperative the state establish academic and financial safeguards to provide parents with the information they need to choose the best education for their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on House Bill 407. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.