



# OHIO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NETWORK

*A Network of Center for Christian Virtue*

HB33 Proponent Testimony

House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education

Troy McIntosh, Executive Director

March 16, 2023

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Good afternoon Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. My name is Troy McIntosh and I serve as Executive Director of the Ohio Christian Education Network representing 150 Evangelical and Catholic schools across the state. I previously spent 24 in school administration, including 8 at the superintendent level. On behalf of all Ohio students, I urge your support for a universal expansion of school choice in HB33.

In my neighborhood are three families – one which sent all their children to the local public school. Within the other two families, at least one child went to public school, one child to private school, and one child to home school. Their parents knew their children and understood they all have different needs. As their neighbor and as a policy advocate I care about and love each of these kids and want to make sure that they have access to outstanding options, whether public, private or at home. A program like the Backpack Bill empowers every parent, rather than the state, to be the one who determines what option is best for their children. This is the contrast I want to lay out for you – the difference between funding and investing in students as opposed to funding and investing in a system.

I want to share three data points that all relate to the story of my neighborhood children.

First, when parents in a locality have been given the opportunity to use an education freedom program, parent satisfaction rates have skyrocketed. According to [surveys](#) by Edchoice.org, nearly nine of 10 Ohio EdChoice recipient parents are satisfied with their child's new school. Further, 58 percent of EdChoice recipient parents are more satisfied with their new school than with their child's previous school while only 10 percent said they are less satisfied. This is similar to results shown in other programs across the country. Opponents of educational freedom will no doubt testify in front of this committee citing studies that show declines in standardized test scores for students who use these scholarships, while there are [at least as many](#) that show measureable gains in these scores. So the results on test scores are mixed. What is not in question in the data is parent satisfaction rates. And the fact is that parent satisfaction is a much better metric by which to gauge program success. Parents intuitively know if their child is thriving and growing in domains of their life that are not measured by test scores – things like their relationship to peers and teachers, a safe school climate, extracurricular and participation opportunities, including the arts. Even the most ardent opponents of education freedom routinely admit that test scores do not show the whole picture of student success. That is why there has been such a long battle over the state report card. Just like the parents in my neighborhood, all parents intuitively know that their child will flourish most when he or she can attend the school of their choosing.



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Second, programs like Backpack Bill are good policy for all students, including those who choose to remain in public schools. This proposal is not an attack on public schools. I care about my neighborhood kids who go to public school as much as I care about the kids who go to private school or home school. They are part of our community and I want them to flourish also. A meta-analysis of 28 studies that have looked at the impact that education freedom programs have had on the academic performance of those who chose to remain in public schools show that 26 found a positive on their performance, including a recently completed [study by Dr. Stephane Lavertu of Ohio St. U.](#) specifically on Ohio's EdChoice program. Why? Because for the first time, those schools had to compete in the educational marketplace to retain students. There are great people working in public schools. I personally know a lot of them. But they work in a clunky, broken system without any of the benefits that come from a free market, including the accountability that only comes from a parent being able to take their child's funding and going elsewhere. That level of accountability is simply not found even by electing a school board. Most of the kids in my neighborhood will continue to attend our public school. I support school choice for them as much as for anyone.

Third, opponents have been making claims that bills like Backpack are going to financially devastate public schools. Don't believe it. As evidence, in the last ten years, the number of EdChoice recipients has tripled. If their argument is to be believed, school districts' financial positions should be increasingly dire. But in that same period, the [collective cash reserves](#) of Ohio's school districts have more than doubled to \$9.2 billion. That is well over a two-fold increase both in absolute dollar terms and relative terms to their annual expenditures – from 21% in 2012 to 45% in 2022. And this does not even include federal COVID dollars because those are not held as cash reserves.

Even more to the point, because programs like Backpack Bill do not touch any local tax revenue, districts have a fixed revenue source regardless of how many students attend. So as students withdraw to take advantage of a scholarship, the state will continue to fund the schools at their new enrollment levels but the local revenue remains constant as if no students had withdrawn. They receive the same local revenue but for a smaller student population. The public school's per-pupil revenue actually increases as a result. Now, opponents will make the claim that they have fixed costs such as physical plant, buses, teachers, etc. regardless of their enrollment. But the local revenue, on average 44% of a district's total revenue, serves as a fixed revenue balance to fixed costs. So those kids in my neighborhood? They are getting more per pupil after a universal school choice than they did before.

Finally, I will make an argument from a basic freedom perspective. The state should not have the overwhelming power to both compel education and dictate the content of that education. That is too much power in the hands of the state. I urge you to include universal school choice program like Backpack Bill in HB33 and give back to parents the power to make these decisions for their children. I'm open for questions.