

HB 33-Voucher Testimony
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March 22, 2023

Chairwoman Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, good morning.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony in opposition to the proposed expansion of vouchers for Ohio's private schools. My name is Joe Spiccia and I am the Superintendent of the Wickliffe City School District. My partner is Julie Ramos, the Director of Strategic Innovation for the District.

We begin with several questions for your consideration:

- A. Is it reasonable to simply give public money to private organizations without holding them accountable?
- B. Is it reasonable to have expectations for one system but not another?
- C. Is it reasonable to expand vouchers and not fully fund public schools?
- D. Is it reasonable to ask the general assembly to act in a non-partisan manner, support the majority of students and families in Ohio and act in their best interests?
- E. Does Ohio have the ability to fund multiple parallel educational systems?
 - a. The governor's budget estimates the additional funding for vouchers at about \$50 million
 - b. Under his proposal 30,000 additional students would become eligible for vouchers, the cost is estimated at \$178 million by the budget commission.
 - c. The additional \$178 million couple with the approximately \$300 million currently being expended... The state is proposing spending about \$500 million public dollars on 10% of students.
 - d. Another study indicates that if all students eligible for vouchers took them based on the recent introduction of the "Backpack Bill" the cost of vouchers would be over \$1.0 billion in its first budget year.
 - e. The State has yet to fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan. Instead of expanding voucher programs, Ohio needs to fully fund the formula for public school students at the base cost as of 2022.
- F. We really have three "public" school systems in the State of Ohio. Traditional public, non-public and charter schools. All are funded with state dollars yet have different accountability and legal standards to answer for in their operations.

We have identified four arguments that voucher advocates use for the proposed expansion. Our testimony will address all four:

**First, voucher advocates note that vouchers expand school choice
School choice already exists.**

- A. Parents can choose

- a. Private Religious Schools- Denomination of their choosing
 - b. Private Secular Schools
 - c. Home School
 - d. Charter Schools
 - e. Public Schools
 - i. CTE
 - ii. Magnet
 - iii. Traditional
- B. In Ohio, Vouchers already exist... Public money transports private school students, pays for special education services, public grant money is provided to private schools, autism scholarships, equipment, technology, textbooks. In fact, private school students who live in Wickliffe already receive more money from the state than do Wickliffe City School District students.
- C. Over 70% of students in Ohio who already receive or will become eligible to receive vouchers, never attended public schools.
- D. Vouchers become the “Schools’ Choice” not parent/family choice because private schools have the option to accept or not accept students, to reject students who may need additional supports, present disciplinary problems, and/or do not match the private schools’ core values and beliefs.
- E. Public schools do not have such choice. Public schools take everyone in the enrollment area regardless of ability/disability, disciplinary challenges, family ability to pay or not, race, religion, color, creed, and/or if they agree with the public schools’ core values and beliefs.
- F. Voucher expansion will likely fund more students currently attending non-public or community schools. It will not put new students in "better" places than public schools. It is a tuition subsidy for those that never stepped foot in a public school and are already in a "choice" school.
- G. Finally, as choice goes, I question the physical capacity of non-public schools to accept more students. If they don't have space for new students fleeing the public schools, then this again is simply a subsidy for those already attending a non-public school not an expansion of choice.

Second, vouchers will create competition and improve student outcomes.

School vouchers do not lead to improved academic outcomes.

- A. Research demonstrates just the opposite it true. In Ohio, the Cincinnati Enquirer did a comparison study between voucher and public school outcomes, the study found 88% of public schools outperformed voucher schools. This fact comes from an analysis of 2.5 million test scores.
- B. Students that previously attended voucher schools who return to public schools found their academic performance improve. Studies in Ohio, Arkansas, Washington D.C., Alabama, Indiana, Louisiana demonstrate this fact

Third, vouchers fight indoctrination

- A. The purpose of public education was and remains:
 - a. Educational opportunity for all citizens. The greatest experiments in the world and the most successful one.
 - b. Teach students to be skilled workers

- c. Understand core academic principles
 - d. Create better citizens and an American culture
- B. Over the years, public education has been challenged to teach topics important to society, and every time it was challenged, public education responded and continues to respond. Public schools do not indoctrinate, they have an obligation to meet the needs of all students and to be accepting all members of its school community.
- C. On the other hand, private schools often times have a specific purpose of indoctrination including: advancing religious causes, promoting a particular philosophy, a cultural dynamic, and/or to isolate students from those deemed undesirable by the school and families who attend them.
- D. Some voucher advocates say public schools promote advance a Woke Society and that this is destructive. To be “Woke” means awakened to the needs of others. To be well informed, thoughtful, compassionate, humble, and kind. Eager to make the world a better place for all people. What an incredibly beautiful concept...think about how wonderful the world would be if we all believed in this ideal, rather than weaponize the word as something evil...

Fourth, all public funds deserve oversight and accountability

- A. Public schools are accountable to the public. Are we going to simply give private schools hundreds of millions of dollars without financial oversight? Financial audits are required for public schools, and we learned from ECOT that some level of financial accountability is necessary for all schools receiving public funds.
- B. Public schools have dozens of regulations related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, licensure, and have significant reporting responsibilities.
- C. Public schools have to answer to their local community. The local community determines funding through voted levies and bond issues.
- D. Public schools have to accept all students and are obligated to provide for every student’s needs.
- E. Public schools have regulations related to disciplinary procedures, have legal protocols, and may not discriminate.
- F. Private Schools...Voucher Schools have none of these same restrictions, but currently benefit from the same put of funds.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to present our testimony to the committee. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.