



OHIO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NETWORK

A Network of Center for Christian Virtue

SB 11 Proponent Testimony
Senate Education Committee
Troy McIntosh, Executive Director
February 21, 2023

Good afternoon Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee. 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 SB11.

You will be hearing today from a significant number of students and families who will share success stories resulting from the type of education freedom that SB11 provides to all Ohio K-12 students. You may also hear from those who hope for that type of opportunity for their child. You will hold opponent testimony in the near future and every time that you hear an opponent of the bill speaking against the bill in defense of a system, remember these student stories you hear today. Because that is the contrast I want to lay out for you – the difference between funding and investing in students as opposed to solely funding and investing in a system. I stand in support of funding students knowing that we need a full array of systems, pedagogies, approaches and philosophies to meet the many different needs of Ohio's students.

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. Who better to determine what school was best for them than mom and dad? 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. SB11 empowers parents, rather than the state, to be the one who determines what option is best for their children.

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. But there are [at least as many](#)



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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. And I will argue that parent satisfaction is a much better metric by which to gauge program success. Parents intuitively know if their child is thriving or not, 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 recognize 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 best when he or she can attend the school that is their best individual fit.

Second, SB11 is good policy for all students, including those who choose to remain in public schools. This bill is not an attack on public schools, no matter how much opponents of the bill try to frame it that way. 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. Indeed, education freedom is the best means to do that. 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 SB11 for them as much as for anyone.

Third, opponents are going to stand here and claim that bills like SB11 is going to financially devastate public schools. Don't believe it. To wit, 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 account for federal COVID dollars because those are not held as cash reserves.

Even more to the point, because programs like SB11 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 the scholarship, the state will fund them at their new enrollment levels but the local revenue remains constant as if no students had withdrawn. They receive the



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same local revenue but for a smaller student population. Its 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. And any accountant will tell you that fixed costs are only fixed in the short-term anyway. So those kids in my neighborhood? They are getting more per pupil after SB11 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 pass SB11 and give back to parents the power to make these decisions for their children. I'm open for questions.