



OHIO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NETWORK

A Network of Center for Christian Virtue

HB33 Interested Party Testimony for School Choice
Senate Education Committee
Troy McIntosh, Executive Director
May 4, 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. On behalf of all Ohio students, I urge your support for universal access to educational freedom by adopting Backpack Bill provisions into HB33.

You may recall in previous hearings on this matter the number of families and students who appealed to this committee for the fundamental freedom to be empowered by the state to select the type of education that best serves their needs. I ask you to remember these families and students as you consider how to best appropriate state budget funds for the next biennium. But don't just think of them as if they represent some small special interest. Consider every single one of Ohio's 1.8 million students, including each of those that you know personally, because education freedom benefits them all, whether they attend public school, a community school, a non-public school or homeschool. The beauty of the Backpack Bill model is that it is student-centered and system-neutral, while still providing a thorough and efficient public option for those who would choose it. In other words, "If you like your public school, you can keep your public school," and it should be fully funded for every student who chooses it. But one size does not fit all and for those who believe they will be better served elsewhere, the state has a due interest in investing in them as well.

Allow me to summarize the three data points that I shared last time that bear witness to Backpack Bill as excellent public policy.

First, when parents in a locality have been given the opportunity to use an education freedom program, parent satisfaction rates have dramatically increased. 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. Opponents of education freedom have testified in front of this committee citing studies that show declines in test scores for students who use these scholarships, but 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. More to the point, real accountability



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and an end to the all-too-common school board tensions can only come when parents are free to take their funding to the school of their choice.

Second, Backpack model funding is good policy for all students, including those who choose to remain in public schools. I care about my neighborhood kids who go to public school as much as we care about the kids who go to private school or home school. All are part of our community and we want them all to flourish. So a meta-analysis of 28 studies that have looked at the impact that backpack-style programs have had on the academic performance of those who chose to remain in public schools show that 26 found a positive impact 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, all schools had to compete in the educational marketplace to retain students.

Third, don't believe it when opponents make claims that Backpack funding is going to financially devastate public schools. The data simply does not support that. 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 have become 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 a two-and-a-half-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 Backpack Bill does 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.

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 amend Backpack Bill provisions into HB33 and give back to parents the power to make these decisions for their children. I'm open for questions.