

Robyn Houze Education Testimony for May 31, 2023

Thank you to Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Finance Committee for allowing my testimony today.

I'd like to start with some numbers. For dual income families living in central Ohio, childcare is almost always a significant expense. Working parents with young children have to pay for before and aftercare programs, school days off coverage and childcare during summer break. Childcare during the school year can easily add up to 5,000 or more per child and another \$4,000 to \$5,000 for summer coverage. That's around \$10,000 in childcare expenses per year per school age child. This doesn't include extracurricular activities if your child is involved in sports or working on a life skill such as swimming or music lessons. Another expense to consider is putting money aside for a college fund. Multiply the numbers by 2 for our family as we have two elementary age boys.

Our family's share of school taxes is over \$7,800 which we accepted when we moved to Powell because of the district's educational reputation. We noticed a need for improvements and changes and tried to work with the district directly. It didn't take long for us to realize that the culture at Olentangy from the top down is not to have an educational partnership with parents. This was our 'brick wall' moment and made the decision to send our kids to an alternate school this fall.

Our family is in what I'd consider as 'the gap'. We miss qualifying for the Ed Choice Voucher under the current proposal of 450%. Tuition at the schools we are researching ranges from \$8 to \$12 thousand dollars per student. Adding alternate school tuition expenses to our budget will create financial burden and will require family sacrifices. This is why I stand before you and represent other parents unable to miss work to be here today.

Ohio Parents and Grandparents want universal school choice. The right way for Ohio to achieve this is through educational savings accounts. Several educational options exist in Ohio including homeschooling, public schools, community schools, or private schools, both chartered and non-chartered. Parents need the opportunity to decide if any of the above are the best option for each of their students.

Nonpublic schools will not survive if they are not providing a quality education with results, particularly if they are a non-chartered school not accepting taxpayer dollars. We are fortunate to have some amazing alternate school options in Ohio. In some cases, the students in non-public non-charter schools are outperforming their public-school peers on ACT and SAT college entrance exams. Take Mars Hill Academy in Mason Ohio, for example.

The chart shown in your written copy, demonstrates ACCS (Association of Classical Christian Schools) members, as a whole, are performing above the national average and the Mars Hill example is performing even higher.

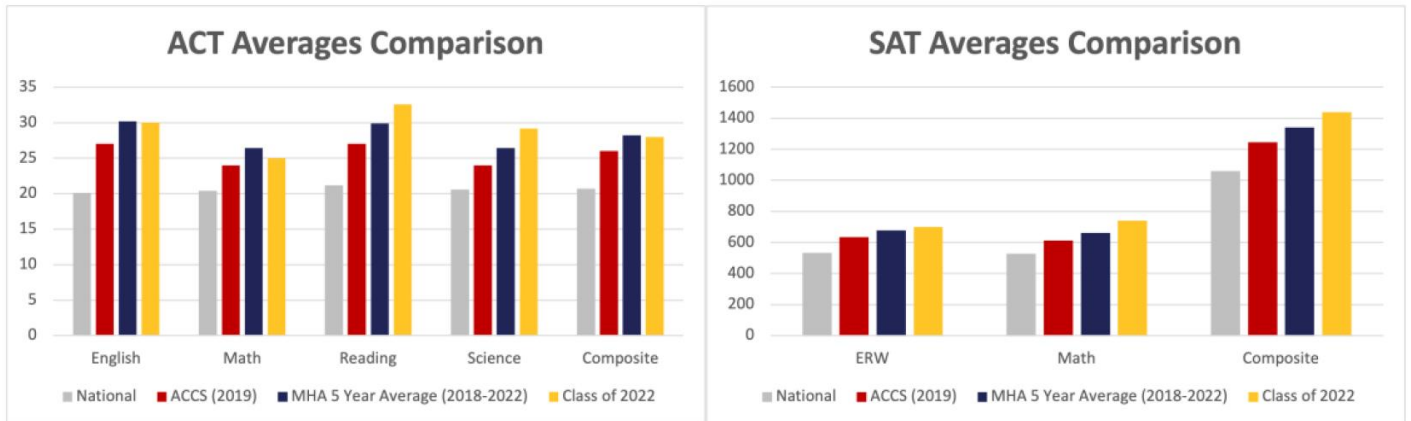
Gray: National average

Red: ACCS (Association of Classical Christian Schools)

Blue: Mars Hill 5-year average

Yellow: Mars Hill Class of 2022

Comparison on College Entrance Exams



Source: Mars Hill Academy Annual Report 2021-2022

No one is a better judge as to how well their student is thriving in school than the parents.

The opportunity for a better education needs to be made accessible to all Ohio's students. The qualifications need to be simple not complex so that all parents can easily navigate the registration process.

There may not be enough private school options today, but supply will follow demand. Ohio needs to allow for innovation to happen to create new schools that will provide competition in the educational marketplace. Competition will prompt existing public-school monopolies to be challenged to meet the needs of all their students.

If only schools willing to accept state funding are eligible for the school choice program, then is that really school choice? For true school choice, an ESA program is superior to a voucher program to grant parents maximum control of the funds to provide to the school option they choose.

If accepting state funding and following state requirements was the key to a successful education, then East Cleveland City Schools and Youngstown City schools wouldn't be showing state testing results below the state average. By limiting the funding to state supported schools Ohio is funding the system not the student. And the system is failing too many students.

Yes, public schools need to have proper support and they are vital to Ohio's children. However, providing more money to failing public schools is not the solution. It is time for a new solution and for Ohio to join other states in paving the way for the next generation to be better educated citizens. Ohio needs to ensure that the best and brightest aren't lost to other states because lawmakers were too slow to realize how important school choice is to Ohio residents. For many their public school is the right answer but for a significant number of Ohio's students their public school is failing to inspire students to work to their full potential.

Competition is a good thing. Competition in the k-12 educational marketplace should not be seen as the enemy of public schools, it should be seen as an opportunity for the parents to find the educational option that maximizes their student's ability to grow to be a successful adult. Other states who have implemented ESA programs have seen positive increases in performance by their state's public schools.

What is desperately needed by parents is a state program that allows resources to follow the student in the form of a parent controlled educational savings account no matter what public, community, or nonpublic school option they choose for their children to attend.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I'm happy to answer any questions.