

**87th House District**  
Crawford, Morrow, Wyandot  
And parts of: Marion, Seneca

**Committees**  
Infrastructure and Rural Development  
Transportation and Public Safety (Vice-Chair)  
Ways and Means



From the desk of:  
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## HB 290 Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Finance Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to present HB 290 to you today. A bill we've described as the "Backpack Bill", meaning that a child's state educational dollars will be just that, the child's. Those dollars would follow the child to the learning environment that is the best fit for them. This bill seeks to empower families to choose the educational option that best meets their needs.

The goal of this bill is to put kids first in our funding model for education. To acknowledge that education is not a one-size fits all approach and that empowering parents to make the best decision for their children will result in better educational outcomes.

I think many of us would agree, the status quo is not acceptable. We have high remediation rates for post-secondary students, large disparities between school districts across the state in terms of spending and quality of education, cries from our business community having difficulty seeking a capable workforce, and tension between parents and school boards over curriculum are all indicators that something needs to change.

I present HB 290 as a solution to move Ohio's educational opportunities forward to meet the needs of all Ohio students.

Parents have for a long time had the legal right to choose their child's school. Their options, however, have been limited to either moving their family to a school district of their choosing or to self-finance private education. More recently, Ohio has made strides with the EdChoice Scholarship to provide new opportunities for financially challenged families. So, as it stands today, if you are a wealthy Ohioan and can afford to pay out of pocket for your child's education OR you are financially challenged and eligible for an Ed-Choice scholarship, you have educational options. But, for the majority of Ohioans who fall somewhere in between those two ends of the bell curve, the only option for your child's education is determined by your home address.

HB 290 would create an opt-in program. The primary education option would remain the local assigned public school. But, if a parent opts-in for whatever reason, an Educational Savings Account (ESA) would be created for the child and the state share of educational dollars would be deposited into the account for the parents to find the right educational path for their child. The funds could be used on a variety of education expenses such as:

- (1) Tuition and fees at a participating school
- (2) Tuition and fees for a nonpublic online learning program
- (3) Tutoring or intervention services by an individual or educational facility, provided that the services are not provided by an immediate family member of the student
- (4) Fees for nationally standardized assessments, advanced placement examinations, and any examinations related to college or university admission, as well as tuition or fees for preparatory courses for those examinations
- (5) Tuition and fees for programs of study or the curriculum of courses that lead to an industry-recognized credential that satisfies a workforce need
- (6) Educational services including occupational, behavioral, physical, speech-language, and audiology therapies
- (7) Curriculum, textbooks, instructional materials, and supplies
- (8) Fees for after-school and summer educational programs

Under our proposed sub bill language, the Treasurer of State office would manage the ESA accounts program. They would be responsible for managing a program including fund allocation, fund disbursement, and fraud prevention. Accountability in fund usage is critical. We're proposing two methods for fund distribution, first being through an approved vendor within the program and second through a reimbursement upon appropriate documentation.

The yearly disbursement for the program would be \$5,500 if the student is in grades kindergarten through eight or \$7,500 if the student is in grades nine through twelve. Matching that of the current EdChoice scholarship. Parents would have to reapply for the program yearly to continue.

When parents know they have options for their child's education, they are more likely to be engaged with their child's education. When parents are engaged with their child's education, that student is much more likely to be successful throughout their educational life. Setting them up for a bright future as an Ohioan.

Thank you chairman and I will now yield to my joint sponsor Representative John.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.