

My name is Jennifer Parobek. I am a parent of a 2nd grader and 6th grader from Elyria, OH. I am inspired to share our personal experience as a family with young students. Parental choice in education is extremely important to our family given our religious beliefs and because we are assigned to schools in a failing school district.

Nearly all of our children's school friends come from catholic families as well, and over the years, we have formed a tight-knit group that is a wonderful community within our community. Each of these families has two working parents. Each of them has more than one child in school. We all live in the Elyria City School District and all of the middle-school and high-school aged children are assigned to a failing public school. We have all made great sacrifices to send our children to catholic school because we are all active catholic parishioners and believe in faith-based education and because we believe our catholic schools are significantly better equipped to teach our children than our assigned public schools.

As time passes, it is getting harder and harder every year to pay for school tuition. The increased cost of two students makes the burden compound each year. Like our friends, we are working hard and making "too much" to qualify for EdChoice Expansion scholarships; yet, we are not making enough to actually pay the tuition. We are being pushed out of private schools, although we are the families who go to mass, are altar servers, participate in school activities, plan the activities, and who want to be at catholic school for catholic learning. Yet, if we attend the failing school, we can go to private school for free with EdChoice scholarships, whether we are catholic or not. This does not make any practical sense.

It is incredible to me that the state thinks a student can afford private high school tuition even though they have been paying for private elementary school. The additional cost of high school tuition over elementary tuition is significant. The cut-off for a family of four for EdChoice Expansion scholarships is \$66,250. Tuition at Elyria Catholic High School is nearly 17% of their take-home income after taxes. Speaking from personal experience, there will not be \$900 a month for tuition leftover from this family's approximate \$4,400 monthly budget after paying recurring bills and a meager budget for all other living expenses that come up for a family of four – especially if there are siblings in elementary school paying around \$350 a month for tuition.

I have a few examples to share to exemplify the frustrating unfairness inherent in the current EdChoice program. These scenarios are almost entirely based on personal experience from myself and my friends with only a few fictional details.

- If I just built a new \$250,000 home on the west side of Elyria, my child is assigned to a failing elementary school. No matter my family income amount, I automatically qualify for EdChoice for her and all her younger siblings indefinitely because, even as a kindergartener, they are new to the district and never attended private school.
- Another student attended a charter school for K-4, then attended a different public school district for 5-8 through open enrollment. She would like to go to Elyria Catholic, so her

parents apply for and are granted the EdChoice Scholarship because they live in the district, she is currently attending public school as an 8th grader, and is assigned to a failing high school for next year. They are also going to Disney for spring break because they make \$150,000 a year and have never paid any school tuition since preschool.

- If my student is graduating from 8th grade and has always attended St. Jude School because I worked 3 jobs and we never took a family vacation for the last 9 years, my student does not qualify for the EdChoice scholarship because as a family of four we make \$67,000 per year and have never attended public school. Accordingly, she is assigned to the failing public high school and we still qualify for zero EdChoice assistance from the expansion or traditional plan.
- Another student attended catholic school from preschool through 8th grade. After 10 years there, he will miss the end of 8th grade and graduation because his parents can't afford to send him to catholic high school and continue to pay tuition for his 4 younger siblings. He is enrolling at the failing public middle school for the end of the year to qualify for the EdChoice scholarship for high school. His dad works for the church so they make just enough to pay for elementary tuition with a few school discounts and scholarships. The family does not qualify for the EdChoice Expansion because his mom is a medical professional with a higher paying job so they make just over 250% of the poverty limit for their large family size (\$100,300).
- Two families are neighbors in a failing school district. The Smiths makes \$72,000 a year so they do not qualify for the EdChoice Expansion and pay out of pocket tuition, subsidized partially by their church, for two students to attend private school. They overextend their family budget and have large credit card balances from medical co-pays, necessity purchases, and car repairs. They live paycheck to paycheck, falling farther and farther into debt. The Jones Family makes slightly more money than the Smiths but have one more child, so they qualify for the EdChoice Expansion program. The Joneses were making \$75,000/year but got a big promotion at work and are now making \$105,000! They complain to the Smiths that they will only receive 50% of the EdChoice scholarship for next year for their three kids. The Smiths still don't qualify for any EdChoice Expansion money.
- A family has 3 children attending private school. They are always behind in tuition payments and eventually have to drop out because they can't keep up and owe too much in unpaid fees. They attempt to open enroll their children in an adjoining district to avoid attending assigned failing schools. The adjoining district only has room for 2 of the 3 grades the children attend. Now the family has students attending two different districts with 3 different schools. They do not qualify for the Edchoice expansion and because they had not previously attended public school, did not qualify for traditional EdChoice. The open enrollment district does not guarantee a spot from year-to-year and the children face another school change in the future. The third child is still waiting for an opening while attending in the failing district.

- A family has three children enrolled in private elementary school. All three are assigned to failing public schools. The oldest is accepted into catholic high school. They anticipate a full scholarship based on EdChoice Expansion limits. Her parents have their taxes done and are shocked to find out they made \$700 more than the allowed limit for their family size. Suddenly, they have lost the majority of the \$9,000 per year high school tuition scholarship they anticipated. Her assigned public high school is on the failing school list.
- Your student attended a non-failing public elementary school. Your spouse is a front-line worker and constantly exposed to Covid. You decided to keep your student home for one year and homeschool. She is assigned to a middle school next year that is added to the failing school list. You do not qualify for an EdChoice scholarship now because you opted to home school during a pandemic.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Senate for its past support of scholarship programs, and I plead with you to take this program and expand it. The application of the scholarship requirements seem to be logical at first glance but fail to be fairly applied in many real-world situations. There are too many opportunities for families who truly need this assistance to miss out on eligibility. The scholarship should be allowed for any parent who wants an alternative to enrolling in a failing school. Thank you very much for this opportunity to present this snapshot of our life to you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.