

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SUBSTITUTE HB 200
TO
THE HOUSE EDUCATION AND CAREER READINESS COMMITTEE

BY

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NOVEMBER 14, 2017

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Minority Member Fedor and members of the Education and Career Readiness Committee of the Ohio House, I am here today on behalf of the North Olmsted Board of Education. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition to Substitute House Bill 200.

The City of North Olmsted is a western suburb of Cuyahoga County. It is a community dedicated to quality education and there is a great sense of pride within the school system itself. We focus on core academic instruction, professional development for high-yield instructional practices, and assessments, giving our students the best possible opportunities for success as an adult.

Our four-year graduation rate hovers around 95% annually and our students typically score above the state average on the ACT. More than \$7-Million dollars in continuing education scholarships and grants were offered to North Olmsted graduates last year alone.

North Olmsted is also a district that has never opposed choice. However, we do oppose choices that compromise our ability to deliver the quality instruction our students and families have become accustomed to. This is especially true when there is no evidence that such choices provide a superior education.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the proposed legislation is the notion that more money might be available for voucher expansion when so many public school districts have been asked to do more with less over the past several years.

For example, since the phase-out of the Tangible Personal Property tax, the accumulated loss of operating revenue in North Olmsted is \$21 Million.

In 2018, North Olmsted will have \$1.9 Million less in operating funds than we did in 2006, the first year of the TPP phase-out. We will have \$1.7 Million less in 2019 than the base year of 2006.

North Olmsted has also lost millions of dollars to poor-performing charter schools over the years.

In the 2016-2017 school year, we received \$229,189 in basic state aid for 116 full-time-equivalent students who transferred to charter schools during the year. However, \$873,369 was transferred out of the district to these schools, for a net loss of \$644,180.

By the way, the biggest single deduction of \$173,500 last year went to the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow.

We think it's also important to note that North Olmsted has been making a considerable investment in its kindergarten program as an ongoing response to the 3rd Grade Reading Guarantee.

While we support the belief that children should be reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade, we made the difficult decision to offer tuition-free, full-day kindergarten in order to help meet the demands of this mandate.

For a district with a high number of students for whom English is not their primary language, providing additional instruction in kindergarten was even more imperative.

And for a district where approximately 40% of students come from homes considered as economically disadvantaged, and nearly 50% qualify for free and reduced meals, charging tuition would likely preclude the students who needed the most help.

Last year's additional expense for full-day kindergarten in North Olmsted was approximately \$700,000.

Please allow me to pause here and say that, if the state is able to find additional funds for K-12 education, we would argue that full funding for all-day kindergarten for every public school student in Ohio might be a wiser, more productive use of that money.

Other mandates bearing direct and hidden costs, along with cuts to certain items such as transportation, challenge all public school districts to provide the robust academic programs children deserve. Yet so many districts, like North Olmsted, remain the best option for college and career readiness.

A study commissioned by the Fordham Institute, released earlier this year, found that students who receive vouchers in Ohio score worse in math and English assessments than peers in their public schools. According to one of the study's lead researchers, while many of the voucher students were better off financially and academically than students they left behind, those voucher students would have been better off staying in their public schools.

And this phenomenon is not unique to Ohio. In April, the United States Department of Education released findings from a study conducted by its Institute of Education Sciences.

The research indicated that students who attended a private school through the Washington DC Opportunity Scholarship Program performed worse on standardized tests than their public school counterparts who did not use vouchers.

Studies of voucher programs in Indiana, Wisconsin and Louisiana produced similar results.

Critics of these studies, and proponents for expanding the voucher program in Ohio, have argued that public schools spend more time preparing students for standardized tests than private schools do. Furthermore, private schools offer more enriching opportunities for students outside of the core curriculum, such as instruction in music and art.

We, in North Olmsted, don't deny the likely truth of the first statement. Nor can we refute the value of a well-rounded education.

However, North Olmsted has little choice but to earmark most of its diminishing resources toward instruction in the subjects that receive the most scrutiny. In the meantime, electives and other programs and services, including AP classes, are sometimes sacrificed due to budget shortfalls caused by funding cuts and unfunded mandates.

Therefore, for all of the reasons stated above, we encourage the General Assembly to reinvest in traditional public education in Ohio, and not expand vouchers beyond the current level, should more funds become available. It is a

system of education that has served the residents of North Olmsted well over multiple generations.

It is also why the members of the North Olmsted Board of Education urge the House Education and Career Readiness Committee not to approve Substitute HB 200.

Thank you for your time and consideration.