



Frank O’Linn
Proponent Testimony for House Bill 200
House Education and Career Readiness
November 14, 2017

Good afternoon Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and Committee Members. My name is Frank O’Linn. I am the Associate Superintendent of Secondary schools for the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, a role I began nearly 4 months ago. Previously, I had served 15 years at St. Edward High School in Lakewood, Ohio, where I was most recently the principal. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you about the Opportunity Scholarship from the perspective of our Catholic high schools.

A bit about our schools.

The Cleveland Diocese has 20 secondary schools of varying sizes and locations, from Elyria to Mentor and as far south as Akron. Five of these are under the direct oversight of my office, and 15 others are run independently by religious orders. Each has a unique charism, but all are characterized by strong cultures of high expectations and support. These forces intertwine to produce academic results such as a combined 99% graduation rate, with 97 percent of our graduates enrolling in higher education upon completion, and ACT results that outpace the state average.

In addition to a rigorous core, these centers of excellence feature specialized academic programs, such as innovations in pre-medical education, computer science, STEM education, business and entrepreneurship, film, and broadcast journalism, as well quality co-curricular programming and a strong ethos of local and global service. It is precisely because we have so many non-public high schools in our area that we have such rich opportunities. This free market principle of choice is a major driver that keeps our schools student focused, delivering high quality education at efficient prices.

What’s more, racial subgroups demonstrate a narrower achievement gap on their graduation tests, one example of what researchers have termed the “Catholic School Effect”: the often replicated finding that students from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve higher when educated in Catholic schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Sander, 1996).

Our high schools work hard to close racial and socio-economic achievement gaps in the 4 years students are with us. However, we believe our most essential gap closing takes place on a longer timeline. As Blessed Basil Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, which sponsors 3 of our schools, wrote “While we prepare useful citizens for society, we shall likewise do our utmost to prepare citizens

for heaven.” Thus when we in the Diocese of Cleveland prepare students for a brighter future, we create graduates of values who form strong families, the basic unit of society. Recent research has found that Catholic schools nationally produce graduates who are more civically engaged, including more likely to vote than their public counterparts, more tolerant for diverse views, and more committed to service as adults (Campbell, 2001; Greeley & Rossi, 1966; Greene, 1998; Wolf, Greene, Kleitz, & Thalhammer, 2001).

Catholic schools provide a tremendous public good and public value.

Enrolling 12,709 high school students last year, our schools accounted for just over a quarter of total non-public high school students in all of Ohio. It is a system that enjoys strong support from the wider community. The member high schools offer merit and need-based awards from their own fundraising totaling more than \$20 million in aid to families, and our separately funded diocesan tuition assistance awarded over \$2.2 million to 3097 students.

Last year 2,902 students attended our high schools on the Cleveland or EdChoice Scholarships, which made it possible for families to approach the tuitions, which range from Cleveland Central Catholic’s low of \$8,500 to a high of \$15,900 just a few miles away at St. Ignatius. Not funding any student fully, the vouchers made the educations attainable for families. Revenue from all Cleveland and Edchoice scholarships accounted for approximately 10.5% of the cost to educate system wide. Voucher and non-voucher families depend on private financial aid to help close the gap between what they can afford and each school’s tuition.

Ohio has a long history of partnering with its nonpublic schools.

Programs such as Auxiliary Services and Administrative cost Reimbursement provide essential supports for the academic growth, health and security of our students. The Autism and Jon Peterson scholarships have enabled our schools to support much more inclusive education; our diocese recently launched the “Better Together” initiative to scale inclusive practices in our institutions. College Credit Plus is another example of a forward thinking partnership among public institutions, families and (in our case) private schools that benefits Ohioans.

Catholic schools are a valuable public good, providing educational and social benefits, and families choose them in large numbers often at great personal sacrifice. However, as costs rise, the challenges for families to afford tuition supported non-public schools increase. The Opportunity Scholarship represents a step forward in unifying Ohio’s Cleveland and Edchoice Scholarships to award based solely on income, the most relevant factor for our families being squeezed out of chartered, non-public schools.

Public education is an idea, and Ohio’s Board of Education is charged with ensuring that all Ohio students “graduate from the PK-12 education system with the knowledge, skills and behaviors necessary to successfully continue their education and/or be workforce ready...” Our local public schools are just one delivery system for this ideal, but they are not the exclusive means. Non-public, and especially Catholic schools, are valuable contributors to this mission, integral parts of the fabric of our society.

We have always had school choice in Ohio. Affluent families have far more choices in that they can afford to reside in districts of their choosing or afford to pay tuition to private institutions. At its most basic, this bill is about giving options to those who do not have the financial means to choose something other than their current public option. What scholars call “choice by residential selection,” is as old as locally funded schools. By focusing on income levels, this bill provides choice to those who cannot afford resettling or tuition, giving families lowest in socio-economic status support to select a high quality school that is the best fit for their child. The US Supreme Court cleared the way for that choice to be a religious school in 2002’s landmark case, *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*.

I was a career changer into education. Like my counterparts throughout the state, I took up this vocation to serve students and families, to provide them the education that they desire and deserve. To realize the promise of education in our pluralist democracy we need to provide opportunities for families to select their best fit; we provide maximum benefit when we provide maximum choices to our families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 200. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

References

- Campbell, D. E. (2001). Making democratic education work. In P. E. Peterson & D. E. Campbell (Eds.), *Charters, vouchers, and public education*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Coleman, J. S., & Hoffer, T. (1987). *Public and private high schools: The impact of communities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Coleman, J. S., Hoffer, T., & Kilgore, S. (1982). *High School achievement: Public, Catholic, and private schools compared*. New York: Basic Books.
- Greeley, A. M. (1982). *Catholic high schools and minority students*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Greeley, A. M., & Rossi, P. H. (1966). *The education of Catholic Americans*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Greene, J. P. (1998). Civic values in public and private schools. In P. E. Peterson & B. C. Hassel (Eds.), *Learning from school choice* (pp. 335-356). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Sander, W. (1996). Catholic grade schools and academic achievement. *The journal of human resources*, 31(3), 540-548.
- Wolf, P. J., Greene, J. P., Kleitz, B., & Thalhammer, K. (2001). Private schooling and political tolerance. In P. E. Peterson & D. E. Campbell (Eds.), *Charters, vouchers, and public education* (pp. 268-289). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.