



**House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
HB 407 Proponent Testimony
Ohio School Boards Association
Ohio Association of Elementary Administrators
Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators
May 21, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill (HB) 407. My name is Nicole Piscitani and I'm the Deputy Director of Legislative Services for the Ohio School Boards Association. Joining me today for this testimony is Barbara Shaner, Advocacy Specialist for the Ohio Association of Elementary Administrators and the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators. Our members are the public school board members and elementary and secondary principals from across the state.

We want to thank the bill's sponsors, Chair Manning and Representative Seitz, for bringing this proposed legislation forward. In light of the state's recent expansion of the number of students eligible for EdChoice vouchers (and the resulting increase in the state's financial obligation for the program), our organizations believe new more rigorous accountability measures for the voucher funds are reasonable and prudent. With the increased numbers of private school students applying for vouchers, state resources contributed by Ohio's taxpayers will be further stretched to provide funding to subsidize private school tuitions. We welcome the opportunity to have open discussions about these important education public policy issues through this committee's deliberations on HB 407.

The perspective we bring to this discussion, on behalf of our members, is the concern public education leaders have expressed for many years. When vouchers and charter schools were first permitted in Ohio, one of the key rationales that advocates identified for their implementation, was that competition from these choice options would be good for public schools. While there are reasons why our members may disagree with that assumption, the recent expansion of the EdChoice program has truly created a competitive environment where we are competing for the resources necessary to provide our students with opportunities for success. Ohio taxpayers should be able to see and easily understand how public resources are being used to educate Ohio's students and the result of that investment no matter the school setting.

For this reason, we believe it is only reasonable that the state takes steps toward providing academic and financial accountability across the board. As parents and students are making the important choice about where their child will receive their education, it makes sense that data about all options ~ private and public ~ be made readily available. Ohio's taxpayers deserve full transparency about how their taxes are being utilized.

HB 407 would require the Department of Education and Workforce to develop and issue a state report card for private schools where 20% or more of their students attend using an EdChoice voucher. The report card for private schools would be released at the same time as those for public schools. Currently, EdChoice students are required to take assessments, but the data on the results of those assessments is not made public until February 1st, well into the next school year and months after the public school report card data is released. ***We support these requirements that aim to provide parents, students and the public, informative data about all the educational choices available.***

Even though EdChoice students are required to take assessments as we just mentioned, private schools may opt for alternative assessments rather than administering the state assessment given to public school students. Because of this exception for private school students, it is difficult to make apples-to-apples comparisons of the performance of public school students to that of their EdChoice student counterparts; i.e., how well the schools are doing comparatively. HB 407 would require private school students who utilize EdChoice vouchers to take the same assessments as public school students. ***We support this change that would allow for more complete and accurate comparisons in achievement between public school students and EdChoice students. Further, it will provide more useful data for state policy makers as to the effectiveness of the EdChoice voucher program.***

HB 407 would require private schools that accept EdChoice students to provide financial expenditure reports for the voucher funds to the Department of Education and Workforce. ***We urge the committee to support this provision in the name of transparency for taxpayers. Our interest lies in a level playing field for fiscal accountability to ensure that state tax dollars dedicated to education are being allocated appropriately and spent in ways that impact student learning.***

HB 407 would require the schools to adopt an admission procedure to ensure that students have a greater chance of being accepted into a private school accepting vouchers. This change is aimed at making sure that if public funds are being used to educate students, admission policies and practices are fair to all students. Public schools are required by law to accept all students, a standard that we believe is fair and appropriate for any setting accepting state funding. ***We support the requirement that private schools have an admission policy, ensuring that all students have options and choices.***

We urge the committee to support these provisions and the other changes contained in HB 407 to make Ohio's voucher program more accountable. It is our hope that those who have

advocated successfully for the expansion of the EdChoice voucher program would agree that accountability for public funds is reasonable, and that parents should have more data to make informed, positive choices for their students.

This concludes our testimony. We will be happy to address your questions.