

Vouchers, EdChoice and Your Taxes

By Tom Moscovic

Note: All dollars that are earmarked for vouchers are taken from your taxes and reduce the funding to your local Public Schools resulting in the need for local school levies.

SB 89 Could Prevent Disaster For Ohio Public Schools-Stephen Deyer

Without legislative action, Ohio public schools face a funding crisis as expanded eligibility for private school vouchers could drain local school districts of state funding necessary to operate.

The latest data from the Ohio Legislative Service Commission clearly shows that House-passed changes to the EdChoice voucher program (contained in amendments to Senate Bill 89) would offer a needed reprieve to children in public school districts across the state when compared to the status quo if nothing changes.

Lawmakers are currently debating two solutions to the voucher crisis, but the House plan, contained in Senate Bill 89, is preferred by most education groups.

That's because Senate Bill 89 eliminates the performance-based EdChoice voucher which awards students a private school voucher if their local school building fails on even a single state report card measure. Recent changes to state report cards have driven a huge increase in the number of districts slated to lose students and funding as early as next year.

If left unchecked, 1,227 buildings – more than 1/3 of all Ohio public school buildings – would qualify for a voucher next year, potentially increasing the amount of money spent on the state's 5 voucher programs to \$500 million or more a year.

Senate Bill 89 would reduce that expansion in buildings losing funding and students to vouchers by significantly limiting eligibility for any new vouchers based on school building "performance" (as measured by state report cards).

Senate Bill 89 retains the state's other, income-based version of the EdChoice voucher, which would be limited to families earning up to 300 percent of poverty. Under the plan, the state would begin directly funding vouchers, eliminating the transfer of taxpayer dollars meant for kids in local public schools to private schools.

Here is how it plays out for a few key State Senators who would need to vote to agree to House changes to Senate Bill 89 for it to become law:

Buildings At Risk of Voucher Funding Losses: Status Quo vs Senate Bill 89

<i>The Problem</i>			<i>The Proposal</i>
Senator	2019-20 school year	2020-21, if nothing changes (current law)	If SB89 passes, 2020-21
Dolan	8	24	3
Hottinger	12	59	0
Kunze	4	32	2
Obhof	7	31	3
Peterson	18	62	6

*Please note that a school district is counted as part of the Senate District if the Senator represents 10% or more of the school district.

The impacts on many vulnerable lawmakers in an election year are stark.

If Senate Bill 89 were to become law, Franklin County Senator Stephanie Kunze would see the number of voucher-eligible buildings set to lose students and funding to private schools in the 2020-2021 school year go from 32 to just two. Similarly, Cuyahoga County's Sen. Matt Dolan would see eligible buildings plunge from 24 to 3.

Even members of Senate leadership would see major benefits from the passage of Senate Bill 89.

State Sen. Jay Hottinger, in line to have 59 voucher-designated buildings in his senate district next year, would see that number drop to zero under Senate Bill 89, while State Sen. Bob Peterson would see his

district's 62 voucher-eligible buildings drop to 6. Even Senate President Larry Obhof would see his buildings drop from 31 to 3.

Statewide, under Senate Bill 89, the number of eligible buildings would drop from potentially 1,227 next school year to just 343.

The Disaster!!!

To the editor: Vouchers short-change students 2-23-20

In recent weeks, comments and actions from President Trump have shown us, yet again, that he is hell-bent on defaming and defunding public schools. For example, in his State of the Union address, he decried “failing government schools,” a loaded term that is never used to describe other public services. He then released his annual budget proposal that includes a \$5 billion voucher scheme to funnel taxpayer money out of public schools and into private schools, while also providing more tax breaks for the wealthy and for corporations.

What does it mean to be a “failing government school?” In Ohio, schools are designated as “failing” based on a flawed and arbitrary report card system. Rather than being used to help school districts identify and address areas for improvement, the state report cards are used to punish schools and districts by defunding them through EdChoice voucher eligibility and by sidelining locally elected school boards. Also, we never hear about failing private schools because private schools are not graded or held accountable to the same policies and standards that public schools are. Nevertheless, Mr. Trump and some Ohio legislators want to keep donating public funding to private schools with zero accountability, all while starving our public schools — which serve 90 percent of Ohio students — of the resources they need to provide a strong, quality education.

Because of legislative infighting, we still have no resolution to the impending expansion of EdChoice vouchers that will devastate funding for Toledo Public Schools and other districts across Ohio. It's time for the supermajority in the legislature to decide which side they're on. Do they stand with Mr. Trump, U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, and school-privatization lobbyists? Or do they stand with the overwhelming majority of Ohio public school students and parents?

KEVIN DALTON

President, Toledo Federation of Teachers

Should state roll back expansion of voucher program?

Editorial by Scott DiMauro-President, Ohio Education Association 1/27/20

Ohio's EdChoice voucher program is exploding well beyond its original intent. It's draining critical resources from public schools across the state and depriving our students of the critical resources they need for success. This is wrong. A fix is urgently needed.

Ohio's school voucher program, which provides funding to families to cover the cost of private school tuition, began in Cleveland in 1995. Now, in addition to the Cleveland program, there are four more voucher programs targeting students with autism, students with special needs, certain students from low-income families, and students in schools labeled as failing due to the state's flawed state report card system.

Because of the expiration of “safe harbor” protections that prevented voucher expansion as Ohio's state testing system was changing and other policy changes enacted in last year's budget, the number of public schools designated as EdChoice schools has skyrocketed.

As an educator and public school advocate, I am deeply committed to the success of every student. I chose to be a teacher because I wanted to inspire my students' natural curiosity, imagination and desire to learn. All students, regardless of where they live, deserve the support, tools and time to learn.

A child's opportunity for success should not be left to chance — whether it's a charter school lottery or a private school voucher. All children need high-quality, well-equipped local schools where they can learn and thrive.

Ohio's voucher programs drain needed resources from the approximately 90% of students who attend Ohio's local public schools. While voucher supporters claim that they want to expand opportunities for low-income children, the truth is vouchers are really about subsidizing tuition for students in private

schools. Diverting resources from public schools has serious consequences: larger class sizes, reduced curriculum offerings, fewer dollars to address the health and wellness of our students.

It is especially ironic and cruel that many districts given funding for wraparound services in the last budget have lost more to voucher deductions than they gained in new student wellness funds.

To add insult to injury, the EdChoice program means not only fewer state dollars for Ohio's public school students, but the diversion of locally generated funds through a formula that deducts dollars from state payments to districts that typically exceed the amount of money the state provides to those districts on a per-pupil basis.

When taxpayers vote for a levy, they don't expect that their property taxes are going to fund private schools, but that's exactly what's happening.

The ballooning number of school buildings designated for EdChoice is based on Ohio's broken report card system. The way the law is written, a school can be considered "failing" and subject to vouchers even if it has an A, B or C as an overall grade on the report card.

The way the current scheme works, buildings are considered EdChoice eligible if they have a D or F, for example, for K-3 literacy. This is wrong.

Almost half of Ohio's school buildings receive a D or F in K-3 literacy, a grade they can receive even if over 90% of their students pass the third-grade reading guarantee. The sad irony of this policy is that private schools that take vouchers don't have any report cards. Parents don't get an apples-to-apples comparison. In fact, a study of Ohio's EdChoice program found that voucher participants fared worse on state tests compared with their closely matched peers in public schools. That's wrong, and it's time for a change.

Even those who support vouchers should be able to agree that providing "choice" to some students shouldn't come at the expense of other students. Unfortunately, because of the way in which EdChoice vouchers are funded, the opposite is true.

That's wrong, and lawmakers need to act quickly to fix the EdChoice voucher program.