

Ohio's EdChoice Voucher Program Has Failed: Dan Heintz

Dan Heintz, a teacher, school Board member, and member of the Equity and Adequacy Coalition steering committee, sets the record straight on the failed EdChoice Voucher scheme. His statement in his Guest Column, Cleveland.com—"EdChoice is about compensation, not competition"—hits a bullseye on this matter.

Opinion

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CLEVELAND -- Back in the 1950s, economist Milton Friedman departed from his area of expertise to dabble in the area of public education policy. Seventy years later, we now know that what resulted was far from the Nobel performance of his earlier career. In this case, it was closer to a Darwin Award.

Inspired by Friedman's work, Ohio's General Assembly brought forth the EdChoice voucher program. By introducing competition into the public education "marketplace," Ohioans were promised EdChoice vouchers would improve our educational outcomes. Now, with just shy of a billion dollars spent, and our kindergarten-through-12th-grade achievement rank much diminished, the EdChoice program has proven to be an economic as well as an educational failure.

Nearly 95% of the students using vouchers in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District have never been enrolled in one of our schools. So, the narrative that voucher students are fleeing failing schools just doesn't hold up. These families are fleeing a tuition bill, not a failing school.

Unfortunately, Ohio's taxpayers are now paying those private-school tuition bills. EdChoice is about compensation, not competition.

In 2014, EdWeek ranked Ohio 16th in the United States for "K-12 Achievement." That year, the General Assembly allotted \$70.5 million to EdChoice vouchers. By 2021, despite voucher spending of \$163 million that year, our ranking had fallen to 27th in the country.

In total, Ohio taxpayers have now spent nearly \$900 million on private-school vouchers, while our kindergarten-through-12th-grade achievement has plummeted.

The private schools receiving this windfall from taxpayers are often worse, not better, than the public schools where these children would otherwise attend. In 2011, The Plain Dealer studied the performance of voucher students at private schools compared to students at the public schools where they would have otherwise attended, reporting that, "Cleveland public school students often outperformed voucher students on 2009-10 state proficiency tests, according to data from the Ohio Department of Education." The story noted that students who remained at public schools outscored those who used vouchers to attend private schools on nine of the 14 tests.

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EdChoice vouchers haven't improved education through competition. On the contrary, by monetizing Ohio's children, they have made it harder to provide the education our children deserve.

Some communities have felt this burden more than others. A recent study of Ohio Department of Education data from the 2019-2020 school year found that 90% of EdChoice vouchers came from just 22 of Ohio's roughly 600 school districts. Of those 22, 19 are majority-poverty, and all 22 are majority-minority districts.

EdChoice vouchers have had a profound impact on the racial makeup of some of our school districts. The student body of the Richmond Heights schools was 26% white prior to the availability of EdChoice vouchers. Today, despite the community's population being roughly 40% white, white-student enrollment has fallen to just 3%. The Columbus City Schools have experienced a similar trend, losing more than 7% of their white students since the introduction of EdChoice vouchers.

In majority-minority Cleveland Heights-University Heights, more than 90% of EdChoice voucher users are white, according to the school district.

On Jan, 4, the "VouchersHurtOhio" lawsuit was filed. The lawsuit's five claims challenge the constitutionality of Ohio's EdChoice voucher program. VouchersHurtOhio is a coalition of a hundred school districts, educating more than a quarter million Ohio public school students.

Dan Heintz is an Ohio public school teacher, member of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education, and a member of the steering committee of the VouchersHurtOhio lawsuit.

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