

Opposition to vouchers testimony by Dan Heintz, board member and teacher

The attached testimony was presented to the House Education Committee by Dan Heintz on April 25. The emphasis of his testimony is on transparency, accountability and outcomes.

Chairman Bird and distinguished members of Ohio's 135th General Assembly. My name is Dan Heintz. I am proud to say that my wife, son and I are all K-12 products of Ohio's great public schools. I am a public school teacher. Finally, I have the honor of serving my neighbors as a member of the Cleveland Heights - University Heights Board of Education. I am grateful to have an opportunity to speak to you today in opposition to HB11.

In explaining his support for a bill decapitating Ohio's elected State Board of Education, the president of our state senate released a statement which included the following:

"The reforms in SB 1 will provide much-needed enhancements to our education system that will improve transparency, accountability and outcomes for our children."

While I don't think that the bill he was discussing will have any of the effects that he mentioned, I agree with Senator Huffman that improving transparency, accountability and outcomes for our children is a solid rubric with which to measure the impact of legislation.

Unfortunately, my distinguished friends, vouchers fail in all of these areas. As we all know, private schools receiving taxpayer money through vouchers are not subject to any of the transparency requirements under which public schools operate. The Freedom of Information Act does not apply to them, so we have zero access to information about how these taxpayer dollars are being spent. The truth is, we cannot even verify that this money is being spent on education at all. We know where it sent, but not where it is spent. Vouchers fail on transparency.

Every school district in Ohio has a locally elected Board of Education. As a result, taxpayers hold a powerful lever of local accountability over everything from spending priorities, staffing, curriculum, transportation, academic performance etc. Voters are never more than two years away from an opportunity to hold their local Board of Education accountable. Private schools receiving vouchers provide taxpayers absolutely nothing of this sort. Vouchers fail on accountability.

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. The PD found that:

CC3508 5.2.23 Tuesday

“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. Almost a decade later, the Cincinnati Enquirer studied nearly 2.5 million test scores from schools in more than 150 Ohio cities during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. This analysis found that in 88% of the cities, the public district achieved better state testing results than the private schools. Representatives, two separate studies, both by well respected, non-partisan Ohio newspapers came to the same conclusion: Vouchers fail on outcomes.

Representatives, your own Legislative Service Commission warns that this bill could send more than a billion dollars a year of Ohio taxpayer money into the hands of private schools. If we accept Senate President Huffman’s goals as the litmus test, then we can not move forward with HB11 because vouchers have been proven to fail on transparency, vouchers have been proven to fail on accountability and vouchers have been proven to fail on outcomes.

I thank you for your time and welcome your questions.