

August 29 article in Signal Cleveland by Michael Indriolo: Cleveland Schools remain on the sideline of Ohio's EdChoice school voucher lawsuit.

It is possible that Cleveland schools will join nearly 300 other districts in Ohio in support of the Coalition's challenge to the constitutionality of the EdChoice voucher scheme.

A Cleveland City Council member and former state legislator recently addressed the Cleveland Board of Education asking why the board had not joined the Vouchers Hurt Ohio (VHO) litigation.

It is time that every board of education in Ohio join the VHO effort to stop the EdChoice voucher scheme. Board members have a responsibility to protect the interest of their district property-tax payers, as well as district students. As vouchers drain more and more school funds from the school district state basic aid line-item, the reliance on property tax will increase.

Cleveland schools remain on sidelines of Ohio's EdChoice school voucher lawsuit

With more than a third of Ohio school districts supporting the lawsuit, a Cleveland City Council member urged CMSD to consider joining.

For now, it appears the [Cleveland Metropolitan School District](#) will not join a third of Ohio's school districts in supporting a lawsuit seeking to eliminate Ohio's EdChoice [school voucher program](#).

Signal Cleveland asked CMSD if it was considering joining the coalition of districts backing the EdChoice lawsuit, but the district declined to comment.

"At this time, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is not providing comments regarding the EdChoice lawsuit," CMSD Communications Officer Candice Grose wrote in an email. Grose did not directly answer questions about whether or not the board of education would publicly discuss supporting the lawsuit or CEO Warren Morgan's position on the matter.

During public comment at last week's CMSD board of education meeting, Cleveland City Council Member Stephanie Howse-Jones [urged](#) the board to take some kind of action against state legislators "reducing their investment in public education" by funding school vouchers.

"The State of Ohio has been just really very neglectful in their responsibilities in funding public education here in our schools, and it has caused just an undue burden on our citizens, and they are expressing it to us," Howse-Jones said. "I wanted to come to this board to ask the question: Why isn't the City of Cleveland a part of the current lawsuit that is challenging the state in funding vouchers and things of that nature?"

Why are school districts opposing the EdChoice program?

Ohio's EdChoice Expansion voucher program provides rebates to all parents in public school districts who send their children to private and religious schools. The lawsuit against the program alleges that it violates the Ohio constitution by diverting funds from public schools. Money for vouchers comes from the state's public schools budget.

William Phillis, executive director of the Ohio Coalition of Equity & Adequacy for School Funding, the organization behind the lawsuit, said he would welcome CMSD's support. He said he hasn't yet talked with any of the district's board of education members or administrators.

Cleveland residents receive vouchers from a state program specifically for CMSD students, not from the EdChoice program. Still, Phillis said more money for EdChoice vouchers means less money for public schools.

“As more money is drained off from the public school line item, the more dependent districts are gonna have to depend on property tax,” he said.

The state has so far spent \$405 million on EdChoice Expansion vouchers in the 2023-2024 school year, according to [Cleveland.com](https://www.cleveland.com). Ohio Department of Education and Workforce [data](#) shows that the same program cost the state \$124 million in the 2022-2023 school year. The increased cost last school year comes after the state removed income limits on the EdChoice Expansion program in 2023, so now even higher-income families qualify for some compensation.

Which school districts support the EdChoice lawsuit?

The Ohio Coalition of Equity & Adequacy for School Funding has support from 280 school districts, including a handful of Northeast Ohio districts and the districts of almost every major city in the state, Phillis said. The EdChoice lawsuit names both the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District and the Richmond Heights Local School District as plaintiffs. The suit is set to go to trial in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas on Nov. 4. The case will likely end up at the Ohio Supreme Court, Phillis said.

Joining the coalition supporting the lawsuit would cost CMSD, as all participating districts, \$2 per student for each year in the coalition. CMSD has about 36,000 students enrolled, so participating would cost around \$72,000 per year.

What does the lawsuit’s outcome mean for Cleveland students?

Even if the EdChoice lawsuit is successful, Cleveland students would still have access to vouchers through a state program designed specifically for them. That program, called the Cleveland Scholarship, is one of Ohio’s five separate [voucher programs](#).

Two other voucher programs provide assistance for students with disabilities and students on the Autism spectrum, respectively. The EdChoice program is for students in “low-performing” school districts, and the EdChoice Expansion program covers all students.

The Cleveland Scholarship, Ohio’s oldest voucher program, was at the center of the national school voucher debate more than two decades ago. In 2002, after a years-long legal battle, the U.S. Supreme Court [upheld](#) the constitutionality of the state-created Cleveland Scholarship. It was the first voucher program in the nation to allow students to attend religious schools.

[Michael Indriolo](#)

michael@signalcleveland.org

K-12 Education and Youth Reporter (he/him)

As a local visual journalist, I see my purpose in building relationships as much as reporting news. I’ve made my most impactful work only after pouring myself into my community.