

The usual cast of characters have lined up to oppose even a modicum of transparency and accountability for private schools (HB407).

Private school advocates want tax money to pay for their religious and/or separatist education operations, but they vigorously resist any accountability and transparency. They want a blank check without any responsibility to take ownership of their actions, behavior, and outcomes.

The usual suspects—Center for Christian Virtue (Ohio Christian Education Network), Catholic Conference, Fordham Institute, and Ohio Alliance for Independent Schools have been in the halls of the legislature opposing any and all attempts to make private schools accountable and transparent, even in view of the public tax money spent by the privates.

[HB407](#), as introduced, would require only a handful of regulations for nonpublic schools that enroll EdChoice and Cleveland voucher students such as:

- Requires public funds for voucher students to be accounted for separately from other funds
- Requires the Department of Education and Workforce Development to issue a state report card for qualifying nonpublic schools that enroll general voucher students and to report other specified student performance and family adjusted gross income data.
- Eliminates alternative student assessments
- Requires each public and nonpublic school to maintain student disciplinary records and transmit a transfer student's disciplinary record with the student's school records upon request of the student's new school.

HB407 has had five hearings in the House. No doubt it will be neutered or stalled completely in the final days of the 135th General Assembly. As indicated in the attached [article](#), the watering down process has already begun with a substitute bill having been introduced.

Essentially, the private school lobbyists want nothing to do with any regulations. They just want an ever-expanding volume of tax money. They expect taxpayers to fund their schools with no accountability and transparency in return.

Provisions removed from Ohio bill that would add accountability to private schools, voucher program

By: [Megan Henry](#) - November 25, 2024 5:00 am

A Republican bill to provide more accountability for Ohio private schools had several provisions removed in a substitute version passed by committee, including the elimination of funding transparency and standardized testing requirements.

State Reps. Gayle Manning, R-North Ridgeville, and Bill Seitz, R-Cincinnati, introduced [House Bill 407](#) earlier this year and Rep. Sarah Fowler Arthur, R-Ashtabula, introduced a substitute bill with the changes that was adopted during last week's Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee Meeting.

Eliminated from the bill was a provision that would have required private schools to submit an annual report to the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce showing how state funds received from voucher scholarship programs are being used. The bill would also have required DEW to post the reports on its website.

The substitute bill also removed a provision that would have required private schools to annually report the family income of each EdChoice voucher scholarship student who also got tuition help from scholarship granting organizations to DEW.

The changes nixed a requirement that voucher scholarship students take the same standardized tests public school students take, which would leave the law unchanged. Private schools are required to test voucher students through either the standardized test or the alternative assessments.

The substitute bill kept a provision that requires DEW to issue state report cards for private schools that enroll scholarship students.

[Ohio spent nearly a billion dollars](#) on private school scholarship programs for the 2024 fiscal year, the first full year with near-universal school vouchers. During this time, nonpublic school enrollment increased 2% and public school enrollment declined slightly.

“The danger of taking public dollars is that over time there’s going to be more and more demands from the public, from the schools that are accepting those dollars,” said state Rep. Sean Patrick Brennan, D-Parma. “They’re demanding accountability for those dollars, and rightfully so.”

Manning said she introduced the bill because her and Seitz are “fiscal conservatives,” saying no organization asked them to introduce the bill.

“If we have a superintendent that is being paid \$500,000 in Upper Arlington schools, everybody knows about it, and we should,” Manning said. “If we have one that’s being paid \$500,000 in a school that’s receiving vouchers, they have every right to do, but if we don’t know about that, and parents don’t have that knowledge, to me, that’s what this is all about. We need the knowledge of where the money is going.”

She said the purpose of the bill is answer questions about where the money goes — whether it’s going to students, classrooms, or people on the school board.

Most parents had already decided where they were going to send their child to school by the time the state budget passed last summer that allowed the near-universal vouchers, Vice President for Ohio Policy at the Fordham Institute Chad Aldis said when asked if the students who are receiving vouchers were already attending private schools.

“I think this year, seeing the number of new students who enter, will be a better indication of who is entering (private schools),” he said.

After reviewing the bill’s changes, Executive Director of the Ohio Christian Education Network Troy McIntosh went from opposing the bill to being an interested party.

“We firmly believe that EdChoice serves students best when the state does not over-regulate providers,” he said. “In particular, the bill’s requirement that DEW create a report card for EdChoice providers is concerning, without knowing what the form of that would look like.”

Despite the changes to the bill, Executive Director for the Ohio Alliance of Independent Schools Dan Dodd, said it would still cause an administrative burden to schools.

“We would like to focus more of our attention and resources on educating children and less time on paperwork that gets submitted to DEW,” he said. “We don’t think that the education that you receive at a public school district is the same that you receive at a private school. We would reject the idea that apples to apples comparisons on a state website, using test data or some other type of metric is not the best way to determine whether or not a certain type of school or a certain type of education is best for your child.”

About half of the Ohio Alliance of Independent Schools’ 46 member schools participate in the state’s school voucher program — up from about a third a couple years ago, Dodd said.

Tuition for member schools of Ohio Alliance of Independent Schools range from between \$12,000-\$17,000 for elementary school to upwards of \$20,000 for high schools he said.

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“Our schools largely don’t make (EdChoice) mandatory, that I’m aware of, for every family to sign up, and those families at the higher income levels that receive less money through the voucher are probably more inclined to not participate,” Dodd said.

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