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March 27, 2020

To: All Ohio Legislators

From: Elizabeth Kirby, Superintendent

Scott Gainer, CFO/Treasurer

Jodi Sourini, Board of Education President

Re: EdChoice Scholarships

We respect and appreciate your need to act quickly in light of the COVID-19 crisis, and we are thankful for the flexibility that HB 197 provides to local school districts as we navigate the remainder of the school year. However, the EdChoice-related legislation in HB 197 continues the devastating expansion of this voucher program, and is expected to add **at least $1 million** to our EdChoice-related losses next fiscal year.

In the expansion that occurred over the summer, our district lost $2 million overnight when a provision was changed that required a high school student must have attended a public school first to be eligible for a voucher. This new extension of voucher eligibility to siblings will undoubtedly increase the number of vouchers we disperse, and therefore, our losses.

Even freezing the number of schools on the EdChoice eligibility list does virtually nothing to help our district. We lost nearly $7.2 million this fiscal year alone due to EdChoice and the state budget freeze, and we have seen no reimbursement from the state for this loss. We had already factored an estimated $7.5 million loss into our five-year forecast for next fiscal year; **we expect that number to hit at least $8.5 million because of this new law**. Proportionally, CH-UH is the hardest-hit district in Ohio in terms of money lost to EdChoice. Ironically, we are disproportionately impacted because our diverse and inclusive community has always offered a wide array of school choices.

Our data shows that 94% of the students currently using a voucher in our school district have never attended CH-UH schools. Our enrollment has remained steady. This confirms to us that our district is not losing students; we are losing money.

As we’ve been requesting for months now, we are asking the state to directly fund EdChoice scholarships until they expire, instead of deducting them from our district budget. The inevitable cuts we now face will be painful and will chip away at our strategic plan goals. These goals all surround increasing our student performance and we have been making great strides over the last five years.

This is simply unsustainable for us. Our district’s budget used to support our 10 school buildings. Due to EdChoice, now our budget is stretched to support our 10 schools AND an additional 33 private and community schools that accept EdChoice. Our district and our community cannot afford this.

Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Kirby

Superintendent

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