

Cleveland City Schools
Special Called Meeting
January 17, 2025 9:00 AM
Educational Support Center



1. **Welcome**
2. **Regular Agenda**
 - A. ***School Choice Resolution**
3. **Facilities Update**
4. **Adjourn**



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January 17, 2025

TO: Our Elected Representatives, Constituents, Community Members and Cleveland City School (CCS) Families

RE: CCS Board of Education (BOE) Position on Vouchers, also referred to as School Choice and the Education Freedom Scholarship Act of 2025

The CCS BOE remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring the highest quality education for every student in our district. As we face increasing challenges, including rising mental health needs, growing special education demands, and increasing cultural and language diversity, we stand firmly opposed to any measures that divert critical resources away from public schools. These systemic challenges strain already limited resources, and voucher programs risk further destabilizing public education by diverting funds without addressing these pressing issues.

We believe in maintaining local control over our schools and ensuring that schools receiving public funds meet the same accountability standards as public schools. CCS is held accountable in academic performance, school climate and student engagement, equity and subgroup performance, college and career readiness, financial accountability and compliance, grant compliance and program monitoring, teacher quality and staff accountability, school safety and health, compliance with federal and state regulations, reporting and transparency, and instructional time compliance.

Over the past several years, various states across this great nation have served as testing grounds for the implementation of voucher programs which have permitted students to take funding from public schools and divert them to private school programs. Each of those programs have been unsuccessful, have faced fraud, have had expansion beyond the original budgets and have had unintended consequences to public schools. There are currently three programs in the State of Tennessee serving as testing grounds for the voucher program. It is our understanding that those programs have not achieved success and have been detrimental to the public school systems. Research from Vanderbilt University and other institutions provides a host of data which indicates that these programs have been unsuccessful¹.

As a result, CCS BOE feels compelled to express their opposition to the voucher program and to articulate specific concerns we have with the drafts which have been presented.

1. **Prioritize Investments in Public Schools:** Instead of allocating funds to vouchers, invest in strengthening our public schools, which serve the vast majority of Tennessee students. Keeping public dollars within public schools is essential to maintaining quality and ensuring resources are available for all students. Diverting funds to private institutions without proper oversight undermines the financial stability and trust in state government and its entities. Private schools



are not required to alter their practices or curriculum to participate, nor are they held to the same accountability standards. Meanwhile, public schools continue to serve all students, including the most vulnerable populations. The additional funding required to operate both programs could significantly increase costs for taxpayers.

2. **Demand Accountability:** If voucher programs are to exist, the recipient must be held to the same accountability standards as public schools, including academic performance, financial transparency and other regulations.
3. **Conduct a transparent review of existing state voucher programs before any expansion.** This review should include:
 - **Academic Outcomes:** An analysis of the academic performance of students participating in the voucher program compared to their public school counterparts, controlling for relevant factors such as socioeconomic status.
 - **Financial Impact:** An assessment of the program's cost-effectiveness and its impacts on public school funding.
 - **Accessibility and Equity:** An examination of whether the program is truly accessible to all students, including those from low-income families, students with disabilities, students in rural areas, and other vulnerable populations.
 - **Oversight and Accountability:** An evaluation of the program's oversight mechanisms and whether they ensure proper use of public funds and compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED, that for the foregoing reasons, the Cleveland City Schools Board of Education opposes the implementation of the voucher program and encourages our legislators to vote accordingly.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cleveland City Schools Board of Education

¹ "Peabody Scholars Share Guidance to Inform School Voucher Policy," Vanderbilt University News, August 20, 2024, accessed [January 17, 2025], <https://news.vanderbilt.edu/2024/08/20/peabody-scholars-share-guidance-to-inform-school-voucher-policy-2/>.

² "2025 Update on Vouchers," Nashville Public Education Foundation, January 2025, accessed [January 17, 2025], <https://nashvillepef.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-Update-on-Vouchers.pdf>.

³ "Fiscal Note for HB2853," Arizona Legislature, accessed [January 17, 2025], <https://www.azleg.gov/text/55leg/2R/fiscal/HB2853.DOCX.pdf>.

⁴ "2023-2024 Annual Choice Report," Indiana Department of Education, accessed [January 17, 2025], <https://www.in.gov/doi/files/2023-2024-Annual-Choice-Report.pdf>.

⁵ "Cost of the Universal ESA Vouchers," Grand Canyon Institute, accessed [January 17, 2025],

<https://grandcanyoninstitute.org/research/education/private-school-subsidies/cost-of-the-universal-esa-vouchers>.

⁶ "Research on School Vouchers Suggests Concerns Ahead for Education Savings Accounts," Brookings Institution, accessed [January 17, 2025], <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/research-on-school-vouchers-suggests-concerns-ahead-for-education-savings-accounts/>.