



**Testimony Presented to State Legislators
Regarding Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program
Dan Meixner, CJ president • February 19, 2020**

Good evening, Senators and Representatives. My name is Dan Meixner and I serve as the president of Chaminade Julienne Catholic High School in Dayton.

I am here to urge the quick resolution of the legislative delay regarding the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship program. The current delay puts the education of thousands of young people at risk and threatens the ability of schools around the state to adequately plan for the 2020-2021 school year. The current uncertainty means that we cannot determine the number of teachers to retain, plan to hire more teachers, nor make textbook and technology investments. People's livelihoods are at risk, and children and families cannot exercise the educational choice already granted to them. This must be resolved, and soon.

Please let me introduce my school to you. Chaminade Julienne, founded in 1850, serves nearly 700 students in grades 9-12. Our students come from 75 different elementary schools and 52 zip codes in the greater Dayton region. We serve the sons and daughters of wealthy families, for whom tuition does not represent a financial sacrifice, and the children of families in poverty, whose education at CJ is only possible because of our tuition assistance program and the Ohio Educational Choice programs - and everywhere in between. Because we believe that an excellent education demands diversity, we also serve students with varying academic needs - students who take every advanced placement course we can offer, students who maximize their opportunities under the College Credit Plus program, and students with special needs. 25% of our students are African American or biracial; 10% of our students are Latino; and 30% of our students come from families whose religious practices are other than Catholic. Nearly every student graduates, regardless of the economic condition of their family or their own academic ability and goes on to attend college in Ohio and throughout the country. More importantly, our alumni earn their college degrees or post-secondary credentials at rates that match or exceed the most affluent public schools in our area.

The Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship program makes the economic diversity of our families possible. Nearly 50% of our students qualify for the scholarship, and nearly 75% of those students come from families who either meet the current income threshold of 200% of the federal poverty level or whose family exceeds that threshold by a few thousand dollars. Currently, the school community - our benefactors - provide nearly \$1 million in additional assistance to these families each year - more than \$10 million since the program began in 2007. Willingly participating in the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship program represents a significant financial burden for our community, but it is one we have been and are continuing to bear because our experience and our success indicates that students, regardless of their families' affluence, learn best and are best prepared for success in college and life when they learn with students whose gifts and talents are different from their own; whose backgrounds are different; whose views of the world have been shaped by different experiences.

My school, and other Catholic or non-public schools, provide a tremendous benefit to the state by providing access to a successful option for students and families who desire or need a different educational experience other than the one offered by their local public school district. Legislators and school leaders and people at the Ohio Department of Education have spent countless hours developing and refining the manner in which the ODE reviews the performance of public schools in the state, a worthwhile exercise to assure that our children have access to a quality educational experience. That this work produced such an expansion to the number of schools whose students are now eligible for the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program is surprising, but foreseeable. It is time to proceed with the 2020-2021 list of eligible schools while considering how the program can be strengthened for the future.

We urge that strengthening the program should include:

- Continuation of the performance-based Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship program. Families have made decisions about where to live and work based on this program. Eliminating this program would create an injustice and new economic hardship in cities like Dayton that are still emerging from the financial crisis and loss of manufacturing jobs.
- The least disruption to families relying on the scholarship for the 2020-2021 school year. The 2020-2021 list of eligible schools should remain in effect. Families have already registered for the next school year based on their belief that the state of Ohio would honor its commitment and make the scholarship available to them.

- Significant increase in the eligibility threshold for the expansion scholarship beyond the 200% of the federal poverty level, while maintaining the schools' ability to charge the balance of tuition to those above the 200% threshold.
- Significant increase in the value of the scholarship for high school students. While the value for elementary schools is at or near the cost of education in non-public schools, the current scholarship amount represents less than 50% of the cost to educate.

In conclusion, I repeat that the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program is producing a return for the taxpayers in the state of Ohio. At Chaminade Julienne, for example, according to the College Clearinghouse, 70% of our graduates earn an undergraduate degree within six years of earning their diploma from CJ - a rate identical to the highest performing public school districts in our region and better than many of the schools now included on the eligible list. This includes those students who received an Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship during their time in high school. These are young people now working in the state and adding to the economic vitality of their communities.

Prioritizing school choice in the state budget is a wise investment in the future of the state of Ohio.

I thank you for your time and consideration, and would be pleased to take any questions you might have.