

## **The Ohio school voucher narrative: the state's scare tactics will not work and it will not end well for voucher advocates and participants**

It appears that some form of universal voucher plan will be enacted into law by July 1. The seeds for this scheme were planted in the fall of 1992 when President George H.W. Bush, in a speech in Columbus, recommended universal vouchers—a voucher for every student. Ohioans at that time did not have the stomach for that recommendation to grow legs; however, Governor George V. Voinovich appointed a voucher-friendly commission to study the issue. Guess what! The commission recommended that each district establish a voucher program, but that didn't fly; so the legislature forced Cleveland Metropolitan School District to provide vouchers for Cleveland students. The rest is history.

The Cleveland Voucher Program was challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court. The State Attorney General argued that the Cleveland district was so deficient that students needed an option to escape. (It is of interest that at the same time in the DeRolph school funding case, the AG argued during the trial that the state system exceeded the Constitutional standard of thorough and efficient.) The U.S. Supreme Court agreed in a narrowly crafted decision that Cleveland students needed another option. Buoyed up by this limited U.S. Supreme decision, the state of Ohio went pell-mell into the voucher scheme, starting with providing vouchers for poor kids enrolled in low-performing school districts, as measured by faulty standards. Emboldened by the voucher frenzy throughout the nation, Ohio public officials incrementally expanded the voucher underhanded game plan to “provide a voucher for each student.”

In May 2023 the Senate President, in a move to defeat the EdChoice voucher litigation outside the court room, requested the Auditor of State (AOS) to “survey” all boards of education to determine how much they had invested in the EdChoice voucher litigation. That information could have been secured by a phone call to the Coalition treasurer, who logs each dues payment. Data sought was not the reason for the “survey”. (The Senate President could have directly surveyed the districts.) The reason for involving the AOS was purely intimidation, which when associated with a lawsuit is illegal. (Section 2921.03 ORC). Violation of this section is a felony.

It is obvious that state officials are very concerned that they cannot defend the constitutionality of the EdChoice voucher scheme in court; hence they are attempting to terrify supporters of the suit.

The current batch of state public officials has been successful in thwarting the majority will of Ohioans on many fronts. WE ARE CONFIDENT that the bullying tactics of these state officials will not cause school leaders to crouch down in fear. WE ARE CONFIDENT we will prevail both in the minds of Ohioans and in the court room.