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## Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Principal Time Usage and Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship

*Adam Dufault*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This study explored the experience of Catholic school principals in Ohio whose schools have participated in the EdChoice Scholarship program. The researcher employed the lens of principal time usage to examine the experiences of Ohio Catholic school principals with EdChoice, with a focus on the direct experiences of principals participating in the program, the principal's role in the supervisory aspects of operating the program at a school, and on the connections between workload and principal perceptions of the EdChoice program. The research questions were explored through semi-structured interviews with eight Catholic school principals and three administrative designees at those schools. The study concluded that no significant and direct administrative burden was created by the program on the study participants, but that secondary effects are present, such as the potential need for the hiring of a staff member to manage the program and the importance of communication with stakeholders. Additionally, this study illustrated the need for Catholic school principals to remain aware of and engaged in the legislative process in Ohio, as changes made by the government can have a direct effect on the operation of a school.

**Keywords:** principal time usage, Ohio EdChoice scholarship

Voucher programs are an important, though controversial, part of the education landscape in Ohio. This study explored the experience of Ohio Catholic school principals leading schools that participated in the EdChoice Scholarship program by utilizing the lens of principal time usage. The study focused on the direct experiences of principals participating in the program, the principal's role in the supervisory aspects of operating the program at a school, and on the

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connections between workload and principal perceptions of the EdChoice program. It should be noted that this study was conducted during the 2020-21 school year and reflects EdChoice policies and procedures at that time. Aspects of the program have changed through legislation since then.

Ohio funds five voucher programs that allow for private school choice. The most utilized and the largest programs are EdChoice where student selection is based on the recipients' residence within the boundaries of an underperforming school district and Ed Choice Expansion which is based on the recipients' income level. In 2017-18, the two EdChoice programs accounted for 66% of all voucher distributions in the state ([EdChoice, 2019](#)).

The EdChoice Scholarship voucher program (referred to locally as "Traditional EdChoice") began in 2006. The program provides scholarships to attend chartered nonpublic schools for students enrolled in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade who have been assigned, based on their residence, to attend "low performing public schools," a designation made by the Ohio Department of Education that is determined by the state's public school report card system. The receiving schools must meet the state's eligibility criteria through accreditation and testing requirements. During the 2020-21 school year, the scholarship provided families with a voucher up to \$4,650 to attend any participating private elementary school or up to \$6,000 to attend a participating private high school, the amount of which is deducted from the state funded portion of the budget of the home public school district ([Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program, 2023](#)).

The EdChoice Expansion Scholarship voucher program (referred to locally as "Expansion" and also as the "Ohio Income Based Scholarship") was enacted by the state of Ohio in 2013 as an extension of the original EdChoice program. Expansion awards vouchers to families based on household income rather than the performance of local public schools, with families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level receiving full voucher amounts of \$4,650 for elementary schools and \$6,000 for high schools. As with EdChoice, the receiving schools for this scholarship also must meet the state's eligibility criteria through accreditation and testing requirements. Both programs are capped at a combined 60,000 vouchers ([Ohio Income Based Scholarship Program, 2023](#)).

During the 2019-20 school year, 39,732 students participated in Ohio's EdChoice programs, with 28,197 in Traditional EdChoice and 11,535 in Expansion ([Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program, 2023](#); [Ohio Income Based Scholarship Program, 2023](#)). Of those participating families, 73% chose to use their Traditional vouchers to attend a Catholic school while 57% of Expansion voucher recipients used their voucher to attend a Catholic school ([Catholic Conference of Ohio, 2020](#)). In the state, 320 chartered nonpublic schools enrolled students through Traditional EdChoice vouchers and 405 chartered nonpublic schools enrolled students using the Expansion vouchers, with many schools accepting students through both programs

(Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program, 2023; Ohio Income Based Scholarship Program, 2023).

Many studies have examined the impact of voucher programs throughout the United States, including in Ohio, on the students receiving them and on the public school districts affected by them. No studies could be found that have examined the experience of the principals of non-public schools who receive students through the voucher programs. This study explored the experience of Catholic school principals in Ohio whose schools have participated in the EdChoice Scholarship program. A study of this population group is needed, as Catholic schools make up 54% of the chartered non-public schools in the state (Fordham Institute, 2020), representing the largest segment of voucher eligible schools.

The role of a Catholic school principal is difficult and distinct from that of a public school counterpart, as studied by Ozar (2010) and by Nuzzi et al. (2013), who found that the principal's role is likely to demand that he or she directly and personally manage all of the tasks necessary to be a faith leader, an academic leader, a facilities manager, a staff supervisor, and an administrator. Managing a program like EdChoice is likely to fall on the principal's shoulders in a Catholic school, adding more work to this already complex role.

Understanding the experiences of Catholic school principals with the EdChoice voucher program can be accomplished through an examination of principal time usage. Grissom et al. (2015) explained the importance of investigating how principals spend their time during the school day, a developing field of research. The growing demands on principals, including increasing compliance activities, building management, student services, and instructional supervision, require principals to become adept at distributing their time. The researchers found that better time management strategies allowed principals to spend more time on instructional support and reduced job-related stress.

### Review of Literature

This study sought to extend the literature on principal time usage and voucher usage by investigating the experience of Catholic school principals in Ohio who have participated in the state's EdChoice Scholarship voucher program. Grissom et al. (2015) explained the importance of investigating how principals spend their time during the school day, as the demands on principal's time continue to grow.

Although not a definitive conclusion, Robinson et al. (2008) and Marzano et al. (2005) found a correlation between greater principal attention on activities related to teaching and learning and greater academic gains for students. Many studies also have made connections between voucher acceptance, usage, and student academic performance. Chingos et al. (2019), Egalite and Wolf

(2016), West et al. (2001), and Wolf et al. (2013) discussed studies that showed improvements in test scores, high school graduation rates, and college acceptance rates among students receiving vouchers. However, some studies have found the opposite correlation. The most relevant of those studies was conducted by Figlio and Karbownik (2016), who compared voucher students with non-voucher students in Ohio. Through a propensity score matching approach that identified comparative pairs voucher-participating and non-participating students, the researchers compared test score data between these groups and found that math and reading test scores were lower among students participating in voucher programs than among non-participating students.

However, Camburn et al. (2010) and Horng et al. (2010) determined that principals tend to spend the majority of their working time on tasks related to administration. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) explained that these administrative demands have increased due to reporting requirements for accountability purposes. Boyland (2011) surveyed elementary school principals in Indiana to find links between stress levels and job requirements. She found that the majority of respondents listed "task overload" as their primary cause of stress, a term she defined as having too much to accomplish in too little time. The greatest sources of stress were reported to be paperwork, state reports, deadlines, and other managerial duties.

Most of the literature related to principal time usage focuses on public school principals. This study chose to examine Catholic school principals, a job with a similar title but with significant differences in scope and in required tasks. Nuzzi et al. (2013) described the Catholic school principal as "both the chief executive officer (CEO) and the chief operating officer (COO), ultimately responsible for all of the formal and informal educational activities of the school" (p. 1). Ozar (2010) found that the role had become more complex over time, exceeding the ability of one person to handle all the tasks necessary to be a faith leader, an academic leader, a facilities manager, and a staff supervisor. Catholic schools tend to have fewer financial resources available than public schools (Marks, 2009), making the hiring of additional administrative personnel challenging in some situations. There is a gap in the literature at the intersection between voucher programs and principal time usage, particularly in the context of a Catholic school. This study sought to examine the effect of the decision to participate in Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program on Catholic school principal time usage. Such information could be useful to other schools considering participation in EdChoice.

### Research Design

One can reasonably assume that the disposition of principals, particularly those who are already overburdened and under heavy stress, can influence the way that new programs are enacted, interpreted, and implemented. How principals respond to any additional responsibilities, either direct or indirect, coming from the requirements of EdChoice may affect the experience of vouchers

within a school community. Given that assumption, the importance of principal time spent on instructional supervision, and the unique voucher program permitted in Ohio, this study was developed to examine the following research questions:

- 1) What has been principals' experience of the Ohio EdChoice Scholarship voucher program on their time usage?
- 1a) How do principals manage the requirements of the Ohio EdChoice Scholarship voucher program?
- 2) What is the relationship between how principals use their time and how they feel about their participation in the EdChoice Scholarship voucher program?

The first question examined the direct experience of a principal in managing tasks associated with the EdChoice program, such as compliance reporting and paperwork. Question 1a expanded on the first and investigated the principal's role in the supervisory aspects of operating the EdChoice program at a school, referring to tasks that are more indirect than in the first question, including engagement with stakeholders and supervision of personnel. Research question 2 focused on the feelings respondents provided in response to the previous questions, generated and explored whether their participation in EdChoice is worthwhile for their school, and assessed the challenges and benefits of the program.

Because no other studies could be found that have examined this particular subject, an inductive study was designed, aimed at constructing a narrative inquiry of the experience of Catholic school principals with the EdChoice Scholarship program as measured by their use of time. The participants in this study were selected based on how recently the schools opted into EdChoice, specifically schools that joined the program during the 2016-17, 2017-18, or 2018-19 academic years. These criteria allowed for the creation of a sample that had either direct experience with the program or an institutional memory that included a time without the EdChoice Scholarship and a time with the scholarship, while avoiding a school year complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The selected schools reflected the geographic variation of the state, representing the distinct cultural, economic, and demographic regions of central, southwest, northwest, and northeastern Ohio. The principals also represented schools in urban, rural, and suburban communities and showed a range of Catholic school administrative experience. The study was inclusive of both high schools and elementary schools and included schools with both large and small enrollments.

Eight Catholic school principals were selected from the data set of Catholic schools that have accepted the EdChoice Scholarship during the previous four years. [Table 1](#) provides a summary of the descriptors for principal participants in this study. Specific identifying information of each

participant has been coded to allow for anonymity. The total number of years that each individual has held their position of principal that the current school is listed, as well as the total number of years that each person has held the position of principal at any Catholic school.

During the interviews, participating principals were asked if anyone on their staff provided them with significant aid or assistance in managing the requirements of EdChoice. From the affirmative responses, three people were selected and sent invitations to participate in the study. These individuals are referred to as “administrative designees” in this study. All three were employees of the schools whose work responsibilities included the direct management of the EdChoice Scholarship program.

**Table 1**

*Descriptors of Participating Principals*

Principal	Years in current role	Years of other experience
A	2	0
B	3	3
C	2	5
D	4	22
E	6	6
F	9	0
G	9	0
H	1	0

Table 2 provides a summary of the descriptors for the schools that were included in this study. As in Table 1, specific identifying information about each school has been coded to protect anonymity. There is correspondence between the school name code and the principal name code. For example, principal “A” serves at school “A.” The grade range served by each school is given along with the type of community served by the school: either urban, suburban, or rural. The enrollment at the time of each interview is given as well as the percentage of students who receive either an EdChoice Traditional or an EdChoice Expansion scholarship. The final column lists the year in which the school began accepting the EdChoice scholarship from the State of Ohio.

One school did not fully meet the criteria discussed above. At the time of this study, School E did not accept EdChoice. However, within the previous five years, the school both began and ended its participation in the program. Though it does not strictly meet the criteria of the study, the uniqueness of those circumstances and the fact that the same principal was present at the school though those decisions suggested an intriguing narrative possibility.

The research questions were explored through semi-structured interviews using a defined interview protocol. Using the Dedoose platform, the data collected from the interviews was coded to

**Table 2***Descriptors of Participating Schools*

School	Grades	Location	Enrollment	% EdChoice	Year Started
A	PK-8	Suburban	245	4	2019
B	PK-8	Rural	111	5	2017
C	PK-8	Suburban	380	7	2019
D	9-12	Rural	520	7	2019
E	PK-8	Suburban	350	3*	**
F	K-8	Urban	350	18	2019
G	PK-8	Suburban	315	29	2016
H	K-8	Urban	258	16	2017

*Note:* \*=In 2017; \*\*=School no longer participates in EdChoice.

describe the experience of Catholic school principals of participation in EdChoice as measured by their time usage. The data was grouped into eleven general categories defined in [Table 3](#). Each of these categories was then connected to one of the research questions. Next, the “Qualitative Charts Code Application” function within Dedoose was used to identify the most frequently occurring codes contained in the principal interviews and in the administrative designee interviews. [Table 4](#) displays the resulting alignment between the research questions, the codes, and the frequency of each code.

**Table 3***Descriptive Coding Structure*

Code	Description
Strategies	Organizational methods, personnel management, task completion methods
Delegated	If EdChoice work was assigned to another person, details about that individual
ACR	Comments related to Ohio's Administrative Cost Reimbursement program
Workload	Rated response relating to feelings of administrative burden
Paperwork	Descriptions of EdChoice activities involving paper correspondence
Procedure	Routine organizational structures or processes used to manage EdChoice
Pushback	Time impact of defending the program from external or internal challenges
Training and Communication	Comments related to time spent in training and engaging with communication about EdChoice
Benefits	Feelings about the positive effects of the EdChoice Program
Challenges	Perceptions of impediments or difficulties in managing EdChoice
Future Plans	Comments related to a principal's vision of future utilization of EdChoice



**Table 4***Research Questions and Corresponding Codes*

Question	Corresponding Codes	Frequency - Principals	Frequency – Admin Designee
Question 1	Workload	23	11
	Strategy	8	0
	Delegation	18	0
	ACR	10	0
Question 1a	Procedures	5	3
	Paperwork	16	0
	Training and Communication	22	8
	Pushback	25	0
Question 2	Benefits	37	4
	Challenges	32	13
	Future Plans	5	0

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating an important limitation. The pandemic changed the process of data collection in this study from direct, in-person interviews to Zoom meetings, removing the possibility of firsthand observation of the setting and context of the principals' schools. While this did not affect the data gathered, it did change the warmth of the interview and could have influenced the comfort and openness of the subjects. Additionally, COVID-19 caused disruptions to the normal processes that schools experience with EdChoice. For example, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) worked remotely throughout the pandemic, meaning that staff members were available primarily through email. The ODE also modified deadlines and accepted digital submission of paperwork rather than in a hard copy format. While these conditions could have impacted the views of principals on the program, they pose a minor threat to validity. For the purposes of this work, the school years preceding and during the pandemic were treated as comparable.

### Findings

Research Question 1 addressed the direct impact on principal time usage of participation in the EdChoice program. Impact is defined in this study as change in administrative burden or workload, referring to the range, characteristics, and quantity of work that is done by a Catholic school principal. When asked about the impact of participation in EdChoice on their workload, the principals did not feel it was significantly heavy or burdensome. Their responses were measured on a scale from one to five, with one representing no additional burden and five representing an extreme burden. Their responses averaged to a mean of 2.73 representing a moderate increase in work. "It's just paperwork," commented Principal F, and Principal C said, "I don't think . . . EdChoice takes up a ton of time, and I love that it still gives our kids an opportunity to be here."

Participation in EdChoice does not seem to be a direct burden on the principals. Although it follows the assertion by DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) that compliance activities are increasing for principals and Ozar's (2010) observation that the workload of a Catholic school principal is growing, it does not appear to be a significant discomfort for the principals included in this study. DeAngelis et al. (2018) had suggested that greater regulation would reduce the participation of private schools in school choice programs. While that was the case in their experiment with principals in Florida, a similar conclusion was not found in this study.

Further questioning explored how principals manage the requirements, and several strategies appear to be commonly used, the most frequent of which is delegation. The school principals did not feel a direct burden from EdChoice because most of the compliance paperwork is assigned to an administrative assistant or other staff member as part of their duties. Principal F described a knowledgeable EdChoice designee as, "the secret weapon to really maximizing the scholarship."

Principals were aware of the responsibilities of EdChoice and of the tasks that had to be completed by their administrative designees and viewed them as part of the cost of participation in the EdChoice program. In contrast, the administrative designees interviewed in this study rated the administrative burden of the program as a mean of 4.1 on the same scale described above. Administrative Designee 3 from School F said, "This [EdChoice] is time consuming. I can't tell you how many days I spend on this. There is no way that a principal can do [EdChoice] on top of their own job. Of course, they know what is going on, but they cannot keep up with these things by themselves." She further added, "[EdChoice] is 70% of my job. It's a lot. It's a hassle with all the paperwork, so you have to have that person who's doing these things [managing the workflow]." This study found a positive trend between the available administrative support and the number of students utilizing EdChoice.

### **Indirect Costs to Principal Time**

Since principals did not appear to be directly burdened by participation in EdChoice, Research Question 1a explored other, indirect costs charged to the principals' time. The principals spoke about the secondary effects created by being the school's spokesperson for EdChoice. In this role, principals are tasked with acting as the public face of the program in their community. The principals interviewed for this study shared that this role could encompass interactions with parents, including retrieving forms to complete applications, signing scholarship checks, and explaining the process and procedure to new families. No principal expressed that these responsibilities were burdensome.

Instead, the principals spoke twenty-five times about defending their school's participation in the program from detractors, a group that could include parents of non-EdChoice participating students, staff members, and local public school officials. The principals described challenges

related to incomplete understandings of the program, such as parents who found it unfair that some students received the full payment of tuition while they still had to pay. Principal E described this as a primary cause for her school's withdrawal from the program, "At some point, the conversation became, 'Well, wait a second, I'm making sacrifices to pay tuition, and these folks here are, just based on where they live, getting to come to school for free.' So, it was an uncomfortable conversation that our pastor wasn't willing to take on."

The principals also described a stigma associated with accepting EdChoice, as if the term "EdChoice" was somehow synonymous with poverty, misbehavior, or students who did not fit the school's norm. Principal C recalled a conversation with a new parent at her school. "They pulled me aside," she said, "and asked, 'Do those EdChoice kids get in a lot of trouble? Do they make a lot of trouble for you?' A lot of re-education was needed for those parents." Principal G had similar conversations with her staff, "So if . . . a family [didn't] fit into what our [local] demographic [is], staff were saying behind my back, 'Why would she take this student? They don't go to this church!' and 'Oh, she took that family, they must be an EdChoice family.'"

Horng et al. (2010) identified six broad categories of principal time usage: administration, organization management, day-to-day instruction, instructional program, internal relations, and external relations. The aforementioned scenarios described by participants in this study fit into the category of internal relations, defined in part as interactions with parents and with the staff, contributing to 15% of a principal's time usage. Ozar (2010) would argue that these types of relations are the responsibility of the school principal and would likely increase the percentage of principal time spent on internal relationships.

Principals must also develop strategies for connecting EdChoice with the external relations described by Horng et al. (2010) which includes engagement with the district to obtain resources. In their study, this area of work accounted for 5% of the principal's time usage. The principals in this present study spoke about encountering this area of responsibility in discussions with local public school districts. Several principals indicated that their local public school districts viewed student eligibility and funding provided through EdChoice as "theirs," and consequently perceiving Catholic school participation as cause of enrollment and funding loss. Principals who spoke of this also identified a need for work that was required to correct misperceptions and restore positive relationships with the public districts, reducing animosity over the utilization of EdChoice. The principals explained that this relationship building requires their time, though none could be specific on the exact quantity of time.

### Principal Feelings About Participation and Time Usage

The final research question explored a possible connection between the principals' feelings about his or her school's participation in EdChoice and their responses to the first two research

questions. Reflecting on the time that they spent on the program both personally and in a managerial capacity, the interviewed principals were asked to assess the benefits and challenges of program participation as well as their future plans for the program at their schools. A direct connection between the principal's responses and their feelings about the program could not be established.

Although time usage did not appear to influence the feelings that principals have toward the EdChoice program, more general impressions of the program were discussed. The principals felt that the benefits of the EdChoice program made it a worthwhile investment of time and resources for their schools. Among the benefits mentioned were the increase in school diversity as a result of lowering the financial barrier to entry created by tuition. The principals supported [Friedman's \(1955\)](#) market argument for vouchers, which advocates for giving parents the ability to freely choose between a variety of school options and allowing market forces and competition to influence the school landscape. Principal F explained, "I see [EdChoice as] an equalizer for our community. We are now a school that anyone can come to, [where they] know they're getting a solid Catholic education and their finances don't play a part in that decision."

In their comments, the principals also discussed the challenges of the EdChoice program. The most common theme in their responses is the worry about the future sustainability of the program. EdChoice exists as an act of Ohio's legislature, and as such, it can be modified or ended through legislative action. The principals expressed a desire to see more funding provided to schools through EdChoice, a simplified application process, and a way to make the program a permanent part of the education landscape in Ohio. These feelings were expressed by Principal G who stated, "The big question lurking is always, 'What would happen if this went away? What would happen if [the state] took it all away?' And I'd say, 'Well, we would be in a lot of trouble, like many schools would be.'" Principal F shared the same concern, "My question is, what is the sustainability of all this? . . . At what point does the well run dry, and then what do we do with those families?"

### **Limitations**

As previously noted, this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this unprecedented time in history was not the focus of this study, it unavoidably served as a backdrop to all principal and staff interviews. Those conversations occurred in April, May, and June 2021 as a challenging school year was nearing its end. All of the participating schools had students in the classrooms and strict COVID-19 protocols in place, such as masking, rigid social distancing, and health checks. Many public school districts were not open for in-person education at this time, and so many non-public schools had faced a year of scrutiny over their decisions. It is entirely possible that this backdrop impacted the data in this study. It would only be human nature for the stress and pressure of the COVID-19 year to have impacted the feelings of the principals in this study;

for example, many might have felt that any stressor related to EdChoice was minor relative to their current experiences.

### Discussion

This study explored the experience of Catholic school principals in Ohio and the impact of participation in the state's voucher program on their time usage. The study could not conclude that a direct administrative burden was created by the program on the study participants, but secondary effects were found, such as the common practice of hiring of a staff member to manage the program and the need for communication with stakeholders. This study also illustrated the need for Catholic school principals to remain aware of and engaged in the legislative process in Ohio, as changes made by the government can have a direct effect on the operation of a school. While the parent, student, and public school experiences of vouchers have been well-documented, the exploration of the experience of the Catholic school principals with school choice programs offers many intriguing possibilities for future exploration.

These comments made by the participants in this study demonstrate the inescapable bond of education and government. Many states have a form of private school choice, but many do not. The reasons are often political, and, in the states that do have a private school choice mechanism, reasons vary based on legislative action (EdChoice, 2019). Levin's (2009) description of the unique role of education in society as both a private good and a public good surfaces in this discussion. States have addressed this tension in varying ways, with some stressing the importance of allowing families to freely choose their child's educational setting, while others emphasize the importance of the public benefit of education as a reason for public education. Friedman's (1955) market argument is visible in this tension, as he explained that the government should fund education as it is a public good. But, because it is also a private good, government should not unfairly influence the administration or methodology of education. The principals in this study seem to be saying just that but adding a dimension of anxiety about the future, perhaps reacting to the fact that EdChoice remains a lively annual debate in Ohio. They also are affirming the conclusions of Massucci and Ilg (2003), who found that participation in voucher programs involve pros and cons that must be weighed by each school in making the decision to accept vouchers. Their statement that, "No one gives you something for nothing" (Massucci & Ilg, 2003, p. 358) resonates with the findings of this study.

### Implications for Practice

This study focused on the experiences of Catholic school principals in Ohio, but it is likely that the implications of the findings would be applicable to principals of any non-public school, including other religiously affiliated schools and independent, non-religious schools. Few, if any, of the

findings or implications are directly connected to the condition of being a Catholic school, making them more broadly relevant.

If a chartered non-public school in Ohio were to consider participation in the EdChoice program, the school should consider budgeting for an additional person to help with the management of the applications and reporting required by the state. The findings suggest that this individual does not necessarily need to be a secretary or that he or she be dedicated to EdChoice management on a full-time basis. All of the administrative designees had other duties, but the expense of the individual appears to be a key consideration for schools in the program and the appropriate allocation must be included in the budget. The consistent finding is that the program requirements are too much to manage for a principal alone.

Overall, the principals interviewed for this study described added job responsibilities due to the managerial and supervisory aspects of EdChoice. Creating procedures for ensuring applications are complete and funding is received, providing training to staff, and staying current on EdChoice rules and regulations affected principal time usage. Those tasks also occupied the delegated administrative designees as well. While these areas represent more tasks to complete, the added administrative burden did not seem to be overwhelming.

Several of the participating principals did express higher levels of stress due to defending the EdChoice program from incorrect perceptions and stereotypes within their parent community, their staff, and in their interactions with their local public school districts. Schools that are considering participation in the EdChoice program would do well to invest time and resources into building the case for the program and ensuring that a right understanding of its purpose, qualifications, and intent is communicated. Conversation with other school administrators and sharing experiences would help principals to prepare for managing objections.

### *Implications for Policy*

As a political creation, the EdChoice program is subject to change driven by the will of the state government. Several principals commented on the stress presented by the lack of certainty with the EdChoice program. If the legislature or the governor were to become less supportive of EdChoice, the program could be fundamentally changed or even eliminated. This lack of permanence speaks to the importance of the need for principals to be attuned to developments in the state government to a degree that colleagues in other states may not need to be. It also signals the importance of advocacy, as principals must participate in efforts to preserve and strengthen EdChoice.

During the course of conducting this study, Ohio passed a new biennial budget that took effect on July 1, 2021. This new budget contains many changes to the EdChoice program, some of which alleviate some of the conflict points mentioned by the principals in this study and all of which

illustrate the idea that this program is subject to legislative modification. The changes made for 2021 through 2023 include:

- Direct funding of EdChoice scholarships from the state, rather than using the previous method of deductions from the state portion of public school district budgets.
- Improvements to the application process and enhancements to the notification procedures to applicant parents, which should expedite the process and improve the timeline.
- Increased maximum scholarship amounts for both EdChoice scholarships to \$5,500 for students in kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and \$7,500 for high school students. These amounts will no longer be stagnant. Instead, they will be tied to increases in the statewide average base cost for public school students.
- Elimination of the cap of 60,000 students who may be awarded EdChoice scholarships each year. (Redmond et al., 2021).

The items highlighted in the list above are not the only changes made to the program by the new state budget, but they do directly relate to many of the comments made by the principals who participated in this study.

While these changes would likely be viewed as favorable by the Catholic school principals interviewed in this study, questions remain as to future adjustments to the EdChoice program that might address concerns raised in this study. For example, finding ways to minimize the stigma of EdChoice mentioned by some of the study participants would avoid misconceptions about the program. Broadening the eligibility requirements into a more universal ability to access the scholarship would help to alleviate this issue. Principals will need to maintain their engagement with the state government in order to know how best to proceed. They must also continue to monitor the political process to track future legislative action that may could change these modifications either positively or negatively.

### *Future Study*

This study was not able to conclude that the principal time usage acted as a deterrent for other schools to opt into EdChoice. Several further studies of the Catholic school EdChoice experience would benefit the field. Another study within the area of principal time usage could contrast the job duties of principals at schools that do participate in EdChoice with those that do not. Time and administrative burden may be a factor, but other factors may also be at play. Future studies might move beyond time usage and attempt to determine the other variables that could affect the decision to participate in the program. Perhaps there are other drivers of the decision that have not been considered here that would produce important recommendations for policy that could improve the program. Another potential area of further study could connect the link described

by Robinson et al. (2008) and Marzano et al. (2005) between principal time usage and student achievement and the findings of researchers such as Egalite and Wolf (2016) and Figlio and Karbownik (2016) on achievement differences of voucher and non-voucher students. A future study could seek to explore principal experience of time usage and the achievement of their students who both receive and do not receive vouchers.

This study could also be expanded to examine the experience of Catholic school principals in Ohio against those in other states to further deepen the understanding of how participation in school choice programs impacts the job of the principals. Interesting conclusions could be drawn from comparing Ohio to principals in states such as Indiana, which has a similar voucher program, or states that have other school choice vehicles, namely Florida or Arizona. Such a study could be carried forward another step by comparing those perspectives with Catholic school principals in non-school choice states.

Additionally, future studies could explore the experience of Catholic school principals by examining all of their interaction points with the state government. As noted in this study, EdChoice is only one of several funding streams provided by the government, including other voucher programs, administrative cost reimbursement, student transportation requirements, and auxiliary services funding. A comparison between the level of state support allocated to chartered non-public schools in Ohio and support from other states presents several opportunities for study. Contrasting the time usage of principals in Ohio with those in other states would help to develop a better understanding of how the principal role can change based on engagement with the government.

### *Conclusion*

This study was not able to develop a clear theory that links EdChoice participation with increased burdens on principal time usage. As an inductive study, this study did not set out to prove or disprove a hypothesis, but rather to develop an understanding of the Catholic school principal experience of the EdChoice program, in other words, to understand the perspective of the service provider rather than the student or the public district. Certain conclusions do emerge from this. Principals appear not to experience a burden because they have developed strategies for managing the program, the most common and most important of which is delegation. The administrative designees to whom this work is passed do experience stress, largely caused by the rules of the program and the need to work with families through a time-consuming application process. Principals do experience an increase in secondary work related to EdChoice, including explaining the program to parents, navigating internal tensions between school community members, and working with public school districts who may be opposed to the program. Despite those stressors, the principals interviewed recognized benefits to accepting EdChoice and all expressed an interest in continuing to offer the program into the future.



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