

Chairman Sturla and Members of the House Democratic Policy Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of school choice.

My name is Diane Price, and I have been the administrator and principal of Leadership Christian Academy since I helped begin the academy six years ago. Besides being an ordained minister, I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Rehabilitation Education and Counseling from Penn State University, a Pennsylvania Teacher's Certification in Secondary Education-Biology from Edinboro University, and have completed 30 post graduate credits from Gannon University and Wilkes University in educational studies. I am also a certified dyslexia testing specialist through the University of San Diego and Susan Barton. I have taught in both public and private schools before Leadership Christian Academy.

All of the LCA faculty have college degrees and/or have teaching certifications. Three of the faculty have a Master of Education degree. The faculty is involved in monthly training to keep them current in educational practices and to keep the academy at the forefront of where education is today.

Leadership Christian Academy is a Pre-K through eighth grade school that is committed to educating and equipping this generation of leaders. We have a strong pre-kindergarten curriculum with most of our students reading and writing before they enter kindergarten. All of our students in Kindergarten and first grades receive an individualized program in reading and math so they can progress at their own developmental level. Our classrooms embrace a differentiated instruction model enabling all students to become successful learners, allowing them to master one concept before moving on to another. Our classroom size is small, and each child's learning styles and dominant intelligences are taken into consideration. Research-based methods define how our students are taught in every subject area. Besides core academic classes, the academy offers music, art, Spanish, Physical Education, and sports are offered through cooperation with another academy.

We are the only suggest you delete only.. sounds elitist suggesting type... fully committed to meeting the educational needs of the students of our area and we test our students for..... school in Erie County that tests its students for dyslexia and offers research-based remediation by an Orton-Gillingham tutor during the school day. Completed remediation of dyslexic students means that they will read at or above grade level.

The academy also receives Speech tutoring, Title 1 and Act 89 services. The Title I and Act 89 teacher tests our students three times each year using the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) test for reading comprehension and fluency. With the exception of "some" students who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities, all of our students are reading at or above grade level.

An additional indicator of our students' progress is evaluated by the Stanford Achievement Test that is given, beginning in grade two, along with the Otis-Lennon test in grades three, five, and seven. Another important indicator of achievement is our parents who partner with us for their child's education. We begin parent conferences in the fall and hold them throughout the year as needed. LCA parents are involved in the classrooms, the cafeteria, and on field trips. They know what is going on in our classrooms and have the choice to remove their child from our academy if we don't meet their expectations.

We believe that a strong, academic, foundation will provide our students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in high school. Our first graduating student in 2010 is successfully attending Erie Collegiate Academy.

Along with strong academics, LCA is a leadership school. We intentionally teach leadership skills to all of our students. In this pursuit, our students serve in the Erie community; bi-monthly for students in

grades pre-k through second, and monthly for students in third through eighth grades. We seek to train up leaders with a servant-heart who will impact our community through service and as role models of high moral character. We serve locally in nursing homes and at the food and clothing pantries of The Erie City Mission. We also participate in service activities that impact people in our nation and in the world. This summer the seventh and eighth grade class will spend the first week of their summer vacation in Cincinnati, OH, serving the elderly, children, and the poor of the inner-city. The students attending this trip have earned their own money through working for others.

But if you were to ask our parents their first reason why an LCA education is so important to them, they would say it is because of the Christian education and Christian character that we are instilling in their children. Although all of our families are Christian, they attend seventeen different churches, and they are diverse in terms of race and socio-economic backgrounds. Our students are Mayan Indian, Hispanic, African-American, African and Caucasian, encompassing many ethnicities. Family incomes range from poverty to affluent. But they all have one thing in common: they want their child to receive a Christian education that includes rigorous academics and a safe environment. Students from 6 different school districts call LCA their school.

Presently, the academy has thirty available seats for new students. The real tuition cost of educating a child at LCA is \$6,000 with our families contributing a little more than half of that cost. The church that sponsors LCA and other fundraising activities provide the rest of the tuition. Over one-half of the fifty families served at LCA receive EITC (Educational Improvement Tax Credit) funds as scholarships. Twelve students receive the general scholarship through the EITC program with ten of those students living in families that meet the 130% of federal poverty criteria. Thirty-nine additional students receive designated EITC funds for low to middle class families. Without the EITC money, these families would not be able to choose LCA as their child's school. In addition to the EITC money, these families have made great sacrifices to provide a way for their child to attend LCA, including taking second jobs, and finding sponsors for their children. It is obvious that the right to choose their child's education and school is very important to our parents.

I was visited by a grandmother this month who has adopted her four grandsons when it became apparent that her son and the children's mother could not care for them. She lives in one of the public housing developments in the city, and she shared with me that she wants more for these boys. She wants them to have a good education so they can break out of the poverty they are living in and to be in an environment that will train them to be leaders. She wants them to have a hope and a future and believes that if they can get an education that lines up with the values that she teaches at home and that are taught in her church that they will have the best chance to become men with godly character and contributing members of our society. She deserves that choice. Senate Bill 1 may not help her the first two years, but it could give those boys the education she desires for them beginning in the third year.

When it comes to school choice, the voucher plan proposed through Senate Bill 1 and an increase in the EITC program will bring real choice to education. There are good to great schools in the Christian and private venues, and there is a need and place for such diversity. A parent's choice should not have to be made based on their economic situation alone, but on what they believe is the best educational fit for their child. We need to help level the economic playing field so that they can exercise their freedom of choice. Senate Bill 1 does just that; it puts families and their children first. If I can leave you with one thought, it would be that America is a land of opportunity and freedom of choice; choose Senate Bill 1 so that parents will have real choice.

Thank you and may God give you clarity of vision as you make your choice concerning Senate Bill 1.