

Hampton Susan

Subject: FW: HOUSE BILL 2748--a bad idea

From: Richard Maziarz [mailto:jonnybird@ipns.com]
Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2013 5:56 PM
To: Hampton Susan
Subject: Re: HOUSE BILL 2748--a bad idea

3/20/13

To: Members of the House Education Committee

Dear Committee Members,

This letter is in follow up to a shorter email we sent earlier this week in response to hearing about House Bill 2748, which would bar all Oregon public schools from charging tuition to out of district students. We are the parents of a 16 year old son, Jonny, who attends Riverdale High School as an out of district tuition paying student. We live in Northeast Portland. Jonny is at Riverdale because he needs small class sizes and a small school environment in order to function. We understand that House Bill 2748 is intended to help families like ours. We appreciate the sentiment, but there are so many ways in which this bill will be damaging: to our family and other families who desire educational choices, to small innovative schools like Riverdale, and to urban underfunded districts like Portland Public Schools. Please consider the following very important ideas as you consider this piece of legislation.

--One of the driving sentiments behind the bill appears to be that it is just "not right" for public schools to charge tuition to anyone; that public schools are not "intended" to collect tuition. Intended by whom? In fact there are many other examples of exactly this practice elsewhere. My husband was looking at a job at University of Virginia in Charlottesville several years ago. In visiting Charlottesville, we learned that they have an excellent public school system. Since predicting yearly school attendance and funding is crucial to running excellent schools, they charge tuition to any family who wishes to attend a school in the district that is not their neighborhood school (in spite of the fact that their public funding per student far exceeds Portland's). A quick internet search revealed that there are many other states with school districts that utilize this practice. Many of us believe that decisions on how to sustain and fund school programs are best left to local governance. There is no constitutional right to attend any school you wish outside of your own school district for free. Given the lack of public funding for schools in Oregon, school districts should be encouraged to be creative in finding ways to provide an excellent education.

--Another goal of the bill seems to be to force underenrolled districts to open their doors to a universal system of intradistrict transfers to fill their enrollment gaps, which poses a threat not only to the schools accepting the tuition students, but to PPS and other similar districts. The original intradistrict school transfer legislation (which was initially intended to allow home schooled children to sign up for an online charter school) was poorly thought out, and its potentially enormous negative impact on urban school districts like PPS has been mitigated only by allowing school districts to opt out of the process. Within the PPS District currently, one is not allowed to transfer to a school outside one's neighborhood unless one can prove that a service vital to one's child is provided only at another school. This policy has effectively halted within-district transfers between neighborhood schools. Where, then, is the logic in forcing a policy of free transfers out of district? PPS will be devastated if the floodgates are opened to students seeking out of district transfers--they could stand to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars which they can ill afford.

--An unintended (I hope) consequence of the bill would be to force small schools like Riverdale to lay off teachers, increase class sizes, and in fact decimate the wonderful and innovative programs they have take years to build. The funding they would receive from transfers would be 60% of their very reasonable tuition charge, which would make Riverdale school in its current form unsustainable. Given the large amount of evidence of the benefit of small school size

and small class sizes for students, and the systematic closing of smaller schools in Portland and Lake Oswego (and I am sure elsewhere in Oregon), this would be a tragic loss of one of the only small school academic options in the Portland metropolitan area.

--Decimating schools like Riverdale will remove vital options for families like ours. Our son would almost certainly fail at our neighborhood school (Grant High School). He needs the personal attention provided by small class sizes, structured academics, and a small school in order to succeed. We cannot afford tuition at the major private schools, and are opposed to religious schools. The charter schools we have looked at are far too unstructured for him (in fact he attended a charter school early on and it was a disaster for him due to the lack of structure and large class sizes). The tuition Riverdale charges is reasonable and affordable, and is really the only program of its kind accessible to families like ours who are not wealthy enough to afford the prep schools, but need a small, structured, uncrowded, and personalized school environment for their kids.

--Bills like this one, which create unintended problems and limit choices, seem to often end up in the courts.

Please, please consider these facts as you deliberate House Bill 2748. Although well intended, I can see no clear winners with this legislation: urban schools lose, families lose, suburban schools lose, the state could lose if it faces litigation. And in the end of course, the kids lose.

Sincerely,

Margaret Retondo and Richard Maziarz
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