

March 22, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

The apparent foundation of HB2748 is that tuition students make public school districts unequal. Is it equitable to offer only one type of educational plan and one kind of public school setting? Does equity mean that all schools should look alike, and that students and parents should lose their choices in public education? I think not.

Equity in education should be measured not merely in tax dollars, but in diverse opportunities for students to find success. Success comes to students in a variety of settings and is best fostered by maintaining a variety of schools.

Not all students learn equally well in the same conditions. In the Portland metropolitan area, most public schools force students to aggregate in large schools and in large classes (often with 35-45 students in each class). HB2748 would eliminate Riverdale, a school district that provides an alternative approach to the standard Portland-area model of public education.

By operating a small district, small schools and small class sizes, Riverdale School District is able to offer a personalized education to students who would not thrive in a large school or large class environment. This type of education would not be affordable without the support of some tuition paying students.

Allowing Riverdale to accept tuition-paying students also has financial benefits for students in other districts in Oregon. State funds that are allocated on a per-student basis do not come to Riverdale for those students paying tuition; those monies return to the state coffers and get redistributed to students around the state. Furthermore, Riverdale directly contributes to Portland Public Schools when it pays \$11,000 per month in rent for the property on which Riverdale High School sits. Annually, that adds up to \$132,000 per year that goes toward improving the education of students in Portland Public Schools, a neighboring district. With open enrollment, it is unlikely that Riverdale's income would support these payments. If the district could not continue to pay, it is likely that the high school would close, the district would fold, and the choices students in the area would have would be reduced to large public high schools or private schools.

Removing the tuition option would also remove the opportunity for students who have special needs to attend a public school with small class sizes and, by law, have their needs met. While Riverdale and other public school districts are required to meet the educational requirements of students with special needs, private schools are under no such obligation. As the parent of both a 504 student and of an intellectually and academically gifted student, I value the chance Riverdale offers to give both my T.A.G. child and my 504 child. I want both of them to have opportunities to mix with a variety of students in a small school setting and find personal accomplishment in a community where each will be known by teachers as individuals, not just as faceless educational plans.

Rather than diminishing opportunities for student success, we should be fostering diversity and finding ways for all students to succeed in a variety of public school settings. Repealing the option for public schools to accept tuition-paying students would harm educational opportunities for students in the Portland area and would limit choices for students and families. Please vote “no” on HB2748.

Thank you for your consideration,

Holly Finnerty