

March 22, 2013

To: Mr. Rick Berkobien ([rick.berkobien@state.or.us](mailto:rick.berkobien@state.or.us))

From: Anne B. Cass ([annebcass@gmail.com](mailto:annebcass@gmail.com))

I understand from former colleagues in Portland that HB2748, a bill before the Education Committee in the House of Representatives, would prohibit school boards in Oregon from offering a tuition choice to nonresident students and their families. The bill in its current form would eliminate the option to pay tuition in school districts across the state, and would be effective July 1, 2013. I imagine there are a lot of upset high school kids on Terwilliger Boulevard right now.

I came to Riverdale in the summer of 1999 as its second high school principal. The ensuing seven years, as we grew the school from 80 to 240, found and renovated a building, and gained support from the district, were both exciting and encouraging for education, especially as so much research supports the advantage of small schools in educating all children. In my first year, 5 of the Riverdale 8<sup>th</sup> grade students matriculated to the high school. In a recent year, *all but 5* of the Riverdale 8<sup>th</sup> graders joined their district school, demonstrating their faith in the quality of “smaller classes, bigger ideas.” However, Riverdale is not large enough to sustain a high school with its neighborhood population.

In the Riverdale School District, there are students whose families choose to pay tuition to send their children to the grade school and high school. Choice has always been integral in the district, and the high school has worked very hard to serve both in-district and out of district students. These students and families are an integral part of the Riverdale community fabric, and have been since its founding in 1996 (due to Measure 5).

I am concerned that this bill’s impact on current tuition students and families, the financial impact on the program, and the fact that it removes choice for parents in determining the best educational fit and opportunity for their children, are not good for the young people in Oregon. The financial impact is significant: \$1.3M in revenue or 20% of revenue for the district’s 2012-13 annual operating budget. This revenue allows the district to support many of the programs that make Riverdale unique. For example, RHS’s Mock Trial program has been successful at the state and national level. I have fond memories of the fund-raising efforts for our trip to Chicago for the national competition – and we came in third in the country. That was an unforgettable experience for the teens who participated – some who came to RHS on inter-district transfers, some who paid tuition, and some who came from the neighborhood.

RHS’s strength has been the faculty’s ability to get to know students, and to serve each student well; the variety of young people, from all walks of life and many areas in the city of Portland as well as surrounding districts, generated a vibrant community of young people, all engaged in inquiry, with a universal message of the importance of education and college. I remember the young woman from another district whose father pushed her kicking and screaming to Riverdale – she ended up thriving and contributing to the community, and acknowledging that she might not have graduated had she not come to RHS. I remember the families I worked with on IEP’s and 504’s with the special education teacher, and how grateful they were because we were able to meet their child’s needs as effectively as a much larger district. I remember the disenchanted, black-clad young man who got engaged in the bridge-building project in Mark Wechter’s physics class. I remember the students who came together to start the first football team – from all areas of the city. I remember a small group of excited students planning the annual field studies events, and the power of spending a few days in eastern Oregon living and learning together. Larger schools face challenges in such a valuable endeavor.

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. Ironically, 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. (And many dedicated people worked hard to negotiate for that property in the move from Marylhurst University campus.) 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.

It is ironic that Riverdale High School was founded in reaction to Oregon's Measure 5 – a governmental effort to save money, and now it might be destroyed by another governmental effort to affect the world of education. I hope that the same strong-minded and hearted people who supported the founding of the high school will come forward to help it stay strong; the school and its teachers serve too many young people too well to be shut down due to a somewhat misguided effort at equality. After only 17 years of operation, RHS is a viable option for many different students. Please allow that option to stay open so that many generations of young people can benefit from the education and experiences provided.

Please vote "no" on HB2748.

Thank you for your consideration.

**Anne B. Cass**

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