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From: Vawn McCollum <lou.vawn@gmail.com>

Date: 03/31/2013 8:56 AM (GMT-08:00)

To: Berkobien Rick <BerkobR@leg.state.or.us>

Subject: House Bill 2748 - Don't Dismantle something that works in education

Dear Representatives,

I am writing personally to ask you to accept this email as public comment in opposition to HB 2748 and urge you to reject this bill during the April 1st session. I had no notice of this bill before March 17 and as a community feel the way that this bill was produced, and handled in a very rushed manner with no proper notice is unacceptable. The ramifications of such a bill needs to be properly researched in advance to truly see how 500 plus students will be affected negatively. Then you can also ask, how many students will be benefitted from this bill?

My husband Lou and I are products of Portland public school and Vancouver WA public schools here locally. Both of our families have a long history of teaching as a profession in this area, giving decades of service, and some in our family are still serving. We both believe strongly in public schools and in giving back to the community at large. I ask for thoughtful consideration of the following:

This house bill 2748 shuts down choice for students and parents who need a particular environment for their child's education.

Our two children, a daughter in 4th grade, and a son in 1st grade, are attending Riverdale because of the open enrollment bill that was passed the previous year. We chose to participate in this because the schools in our area were cutting all the "elective programs" my children love, such as art, music, and PE. Their in district schools are successful schools, yet these "extras" were being eliminated and my kids were hating going to school even at a very young age. Now our kids have finally found a school that meets their needs to celebrate those who are creatively bent verses just academic. This, in turn, has helped both my kids love school again. My daughter also now succeeds in her academics as well. This year she exceeded the math and reading goals established by the state testing. Our son, though not at testing level, is thriving here as well. We've been elated to find this gem of a school. We need a choice for our kids to attend a public school that still offers what I had when I was a kid.

The application process currently part of Riverdale's out of districts students is not to eliminate the difficult children or special needs they may have. Instead it's to make sure that Riverdale is a good fit with the child coming in. Riverdale actually exceeds in the area of special needs. My daughter has an IEP plan for her ADHD. She was behind her grade by a grade and a half at the beginning of last year. This school is the first place I've had my daughter where all parties involved are fully aware and on the same page as to her needs to help her thrive. All this personal attention has been so successful, this spring she will most likely no longer need to have an IEP.

I would love for those making decisions to come look into Riverdale further to see how we do it?. How can all public schools provide these basic leaning skills? You will find that it's not only because of the money the community puts into this school that makes it a magical learning environment. It's the people of Riverdale helping make it the best it can be. It's the focus that our kids education is important yet different for every child. Teachers are empowered be aware of each child's needs because the class sizes being at a manageable level.

It seems there are better ways to create equity in Oregon's education, rather than dismantling a school that works. Some ideas may be to require successful schools to provide scholarships for low income families outside of their district. Or re-define open enrollment to be for kids who financially cannot afford private education and therefore can find a school close by that fits that child's needs. Equity is not achieved by destroying a district that delivers a progressive, well-rounded education where the students are encouraged to engage and give back locally and globally. Eliminating tuition would also reduce, if not remove entirely, these annual giving back programs who help those in need.

Proponents of this bill have targeted academically successful districts and rather than trying to determine and copy why they work. Rather, they seek to erase the progress these schools have made. Because Riverdale is a small district, additional tuition students have enabled it to scale opportunities for the entire student body. Thus, Riverdale has been able to offer PE, sports, arts, music, Library, field studies, small class size and differentiated instruction for all it's students. Riverdale has created this well rounded learning environment on a very efficient budget without a lot of overhead or "fluff". The thing that makes Riverdale most unique is the close knit student, staff, parent community, rich in communication and volunteerism.

This bill implies that by excluding tuition students, the home district of the tuition students would improve academically. Yet there is zero proof that excluding tuition students will elevate the home districts of those students. To make a change, the correlation must be shown. Otherwise you are making the tuition students (and the students in the district accepting them) guinea pigs in an unproven, untested and reckless theory. I know for a fact that having my kids return to their home district school, they would still not provide the creative programs that my children need to succeed.

It's because of these different avenues of enrollment that help create a school with a diverse student body from all financial levels and ethnicities around the Portland area. HB 2748 would decimate Riverdale and send even more children to private school eliminating that diverse population that exist now. Indeed, accepting tuition students is a win-win for Riverdale and the State of Oregon.

If an idea is worthy of a House Bill, it is worthy of communication to the impacted taxpayers and must stand up to transparency, scrutiny and debate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Vawn and Lou McCollum
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