

Submitter: Gregg Heacock
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB4161

Revised: Vote "NO" on HB 4161

As a retired teacher who believes that public education is the cornerstone of a democratic society, I support many changes that would give students, families, and teachers more agency in determining what would work best to engage each student in exploring various aspects of a broad curriculum by presenting challenges, raising questions, and allowing discussion that furthers classroom inquiry that reward curiosity and perseverance. I understand that many classrooms, schools, and districts struggle to get things right.

But well-funded groups, like The Heritage Foundation that sends me emails to sell their agenda for defunding public education, are more interested in advancing the fortunes of those invested in subverting our justice system and defunding public institutions by disrupting school district meetings and threatening librarians with closure unless they remove books addressing the diverse living experiences of many children in their communities.

If there is a benefit to be derived from the political disruption and chaos they promote, it might be shaking up status quo bureaucratic top-down approaches to help students get more right answers on statewide and district paid-for assessments that deprive students and teachers the personal agency that drives us all to learn more about ourselves and the world we share with strangers. But that possible benefit does not justify stealing public funds from an educational system struggling to fulfill its mandate to serve all children equally—that is, addressing each child's personal social-emotional-cognitive needs to support their educational growth.

School boards, today, are under attack, their meetings disrupted often by people who have no children enrolled in their schools. These attacks are designed to frighten districts into limiting public access to board meetings, undermining efforts to offer meaningful roles for parents and caretakers in working with districts to solve problems they want addressed.

Randomly selecting comments submitted supporting this bill, I was not surprised to see how many accused school districts of catering to political interests that seek to indoctrinate children rather than support the value of personal inquiry, critical thinking, and creative expression. As a student in the '50s and '60s and a struggling teacher in the '70s and '80s, I saw many textbooks geared more toward

indoctrination than exploration, and they didn't serve students well. Instead, they denied them the value of their own culture, history, and experience. This bill is designed to keep children from thinking beyond past assumptions. As schools struggle to live up to the mandate to serve all children equally, offering children, each, an educational environment that serves their individual needs, HB 4161 would take away funds needed to support this effort. It would encourage families to give up on helping public schools properly address their children's needs, believing that a more regimented learning environment or one less structured and not accountable for erratic attendance and poor learning outcomes might serve their children better. Yet many districts already offer these options and with the accountability taxpayers deserve.

Legislators have many bills that would use public funds wisely to increase options for students, families, caretakers, teachers, districts. This is not one of them. This is a sham, a scheme to defund the future our children seek, hampering our democratic institutions and undermining efforts of teachers to be given a proper role in improving learning environments and providing engaging optional programs with project-based learning where outcomes allow students to assess their own progress. Schools need funds to offer more positive community experiences public education was created to deliver.

Support what's best for families and our children: vote "NO" on HB 4161.

Gregg Heacock