

I oppose Bill SB 223 because it gives the State too much control over private schools.

First, SB 223 allows the state to push upon private schools beliefs contrary to some religious communities. Besides curtailing religious freedoms outlined in the First Amendment, this bill assumes that the State Board of Education never errs in the beliefs it promotes. Historically, this has not always been true. We still need religious freedom for our schools.

Second, private schools outside the stereotypical Christian school may also be negatively impacted. Consider, for example, how an increase in xenophobic sentiments could impact The International School in Portland, or a rise in anti-Semitic attitude could impact schools affiliated with a synagogue. It's nice to think the Board of Education will remain immune, but that could change. These laws and powers may be used someday by people with very different views. It is possible that the very advocates of SB 223 will have cause for concern!

Third, SB 223 erodes the autonomy that allows private schools to make effective curriculum choices:

a.) Public schools do sometimes err in curriculum choices. A retired teacher once told me that at one point, the public school she taught in banned teaching using phonics, but this proved so ineffective that she and other teachers still used their old phonic materials even at risk of their jobs.

b.) Private schools can avoid or correct mistakes in curriculum choices faster than public schools. A widely-used math curriculum nearly robbed my daughter of her love of math and her self-confidence across all areas of learning. Thankfully, at our private school, her teacher discontinued use of that curriculum, and the school purchased new curriculum for the next year using money from a fundraising campaign.

c.) Some of the best public-school teachers I had developed their own curriculum outside the mandated materials. I seriously doubt this would be permitted today. Teachers "teach to the test" instead of adapting curriculum to deal with current issues. SB 223 now invades private-school teachers' professional space also.

Fourth, public schools have opportunity to benefit from private schools' example. A smaller, independent school is free experiment not only with curriculum, but also teaching methods, teacher-to-teacher mentoring, volunteering models, etc. By studying these smaller models, public schools can learn methods and programs that they, too, can benefit from without having to take every risk or make every experiment themselves. Again, SB 223 destroys the autonomy necessary for this.

Fifth, sometimes public schools are simply unable to provide what is needed. A year ago, when Oregon first entered lockdown for the pandemic, I was impressed with how our daughter's private school prepared for remote learning even ahead of the governor's orders, then implemented a remote learning plan far better than those in the public schools I had heard about from many sources, including my neighbors. Would a registered school have been permitted to do anything different than their public counterparts?

Parents who take issue with a private school's actions often have more influence for change. If that fails, the parents always have latitude to remove the student from that school and place them in another school, public or private. However, if the State Board of Education mandates the same thing for all schools, there is no escape.

There's an old proverb "Pride goes before a downfall, but humility comes before honor." SB 223 proudly assumes the State Board of Education will never make a mistake. It assumes that private schools make more mistakes than public schools and thus need more management. These assumptions are not always valid. I am still at a loss to explain how SB 223 will improve either public or private schools, but I clearly see how it is a detriment to both, and a threat to the First Amendment besides. SB 223 needs to be defeated.