

Dear Chairman Dembrow,

I am writing to you to strongly oppose SB 223. I am a public employee and my wife is a public school teacher. We made a calculated and life-changing decision to send both our daughters to Salem Academy Christian School. (10th and 8th grade respectively). My wife urged me to stick to a few specific concepts when writing this, however, this SB is so frustrating to me and embarrassing to our state I chose to tell our story instead. While attending public schools, our daughters were subject to unrestricted bullying and bashing by both students and teachers for their faith in God and for my chosen career. It was conducted by staff under the guise of "discussion" or "debate", however it is clear that children are seldom in position to "debate" with an adult. Furthermore, since this was also the stance of the school district and ODE, my wife constantly felt as though her career was in jeopardy whenever we pushed the issue (as she works in the same district). It is no secret that the public school system no longer is concerned with holding kids accountable, but rather to provide unlimited opportunities to correct the errors and when students refuse to correct them or are unable to complete the work, they are passed on to the next grade regardless to become someone else's problem and eventually into the work force (or government programs). The days of "earning your grade, learning a skill set and having accountability for your actions" are no longer applied in public schools. These values and work ethics and accountability are continually enforced at home, where again they collide with a lack of those values taught in public schools. This is not our experience at all at Salem Academy Christian School. Why would you jeopardize this?

Our children arrived at Salem Academy Christian School and were immediately welcomed. They excelled in public school and were placed in advanced classes at Salem Academy where they soon realized they were not only struggling in the advanced classes but also in several of the traditional classes. There was an expectation of knowledge retention, not just the ability to find an answer. They were allowed to take their test and if they failed to prepare, they learned quickly to prepare better the next time rather than be given unlimited opportunities to retake the test because it was "too hard". When homework is not completed by the assigned due date, they are either not accepted or they are taken at a reduction. Although an adjustment at first, this was a welcome sight because they immediately rose to the occasion and were able to excel. My oldest daughter is working towards her Master's Degree at Idaho State University in their Honors Program. She stated during several of her freshman classes how many of the lessons are repeated from what she learned in her advanced classes from Salem Academy.

Limiting the educational experience by holding extracurricular activities hostage is embarrassing and cruel. Extra curricular activities enhance the personal and educational growth of our students. As we have seen during the Covid pandemic, sports, music and clubs are important for the mental health of our students. Why would you threaten to take that away? In a state where our public schools and graduation rates are among the lowest, the answer is not to throw more money at the schools nor is it to punish those schools that are doing things correctly in order to raise up the public schools.

In regards to accountability and the pride for children achieving on their own centers around "distance learning". I watched as my child was challenged and worked with through the curriculum to obtain the knowledge necessary to show competency in that class. Public schools use distance learning as a day care with a "passing grade" being urged for showing up to one class (graduation rates???)

I strongly urge you to vote no on this damaging bill and leave our private school system alone.