

Submitter: Richard Burke
On Behalf Of: Libertarian Leadership Council
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB3068

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,

When I married my wife Natasha 13 years ago, I inherited a brilliant 14 year-old step daughter, Anastasia, who had been going to school in Russia. After coming to the United States, Anastasia attended Westview High School in the Beaverton School District. We learned fast that the culture of American public schools differs drastically from the culture of schools in Russia, and the culture shock had a very negative influence on Anastasia.

Russian middle and high schools do not typically have formally organized sport programs like we do. They don't have cheerleaders. Most of them don't have school plays or dances. The physical movement of students is extremely regimented during the school day. There are no school busses.

Anastasia, extremely advanced in most academic subjects, was unable to adapt to the public school environment. The idea of homecoming dances, proms, and other such activities seemed ridiculous and infantile to her. The social cliques formed around various activities, the extracurricular activities themselves, the open and relatively unstructured environment, and other such factors making up the non-academic factors of student life in public schools really put the buzz on her.

Where she sailed through challenging academic classes before coming to the United States, Anastasia struggled at Westview almost immediately. Her inability to merge into the school's culture and engage with normal student life caused her to turn inward in a destructive way. There were frequent problems between Anastasia and her teachers. There were discipline problems. She regularly missed homework deadlines (though she had no problem with the curriculum itself). Attempting to deal with these problems at home was disruptive to family life. Anastasia skipped a lot of classes and looked for any opportunity to avoid going to school.

Ultimately, Anastasia did not graduate high school with her class. We had to sign her up for special summer programs which, by the skin of her teeth and incessant prodding on our part, she completed. She finally got her Westview High School diploma, but it is the only high school diploma I have ever seen bearing a September issue date instead of May or June. Her diploma date was testament to the difficult journey to (barely) get Anastasia through high school.

Almost immediately after getting her diploma, without saying a word and stunning us

all, Anastasia enrolled in Portland Community College, got a full-time job as an Assistant Property Manager for the Oswego Pointe apartment complex in Lake Oswego, and rented an apartment of her own. Now, almost 28 years old, she is in charge of Human Resources for a chain of 20 smoke shops. Literally, the second Anastasia got out of the high school environment she was in, she prospered immediately across the board.

None of this is intended to disparage Westview High School or the Beaverton School District. These entities serve many students well. But over the decades we have learned that different students have different learning styles and thrive in different learning environments.

While the typical high school environment might be fine for many or even most students, it is not right for everyone. If anything, we have learned that our schools and educational environments must become as diverse as our children are in order for them to have the best chance to succeed. That is why I urge you to support House Bill 3068.

If passing a GED approximates the completion of a basic high school education, it should be made into one of the options available to students. If we had this option while Anastasia was in school, we would have taken it immediately. Likely, given her personal initiatives after high school, she would have gone directly to college and many would have voided a lot of grief. Vote YES on HB3068. Thank you.