

Amber Heinert

Bill HB 1387

Dear House Education Committee:

My name is Amber Heinert and I am addressing this committee as a concerned parent. As a resident of Bismarck, ND and citizen of District 30 I am in favor of HB 1387 as it addresses potential school closures on election days if schools are used as polling locations.

Solheim Elementary has been my voting location for the 2022 and 2024 elections. I have a few concerns regarding voting in a location with students, faculty and staff present.

As it works now for regular daily routines, students are dropped off at the front door and enter the school on his/her own. Once school starts the doors are locked and if you need to enter the school you must enter the front doors into the breeze way and ring the doorbell for the office. My concern has been on previous election days the front doors have been unlocked for voters. In the November 2024 election the gym door was available for voters to enter. Through no fault of the school, as they have taken precautions and done their best to make accommodations to limit the public access to the rest of the school, students and staff. This includes having students eat lunch in their classrooms, using the existing gate to block the gym and the office from the rest of the school and use the divider provided in the gymnasium. However, I do not feel that this is providing enough security for everyone inside the school during election hours.

If I need to pick my child up early from school for any number of reasons (doctors' appointment, got sick during the day, vacation, etc.) I need to ring the doorbell and get 'buzzed in' from the office to enter the school. To which I am limited to stay in the office until my child also arrives in the office. As a parent you are not allowed to walk to the classroom to pickup your child. This rule is in place to ensure the safety of all inside the school. With the enormous increase in school violence and shootings proper measures have been taken to provide safety to students, faculty and staff. So, my question is why are we allowing the general public to then walk openly into a school to vote?

Another concern I have is that Solheim also hosts the BLAST (Bismarck's Life After School Time) program which runs from 3:05pm-6pm on school days. During the November election students participating in this program and the BLAST Leaders were only separated from voters by the gymnasium's large curtain divider. Again, through no fault of the school as they were doing their best to make accommodations.

With the current political climate in our country and the violence in schools I feel that we can find alternative options to continue to ensure the safety of our children, our beloved teachers, administrators and staff. I would rather see a separate election location all together. However, exploring a school closure day is another option.

Thank you for your consideration on helping protect our children with HB 1387.

Sincerely,

Amber Heinert

Concerned Parent, District 30