

Chairman Beard and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Jeff Ringstad, I am the school administrator at Our Redeemer's Christian School

I would like to provide testimony regarding two common arguments from our opposition when it comes to providing state support for parental choice in education. We commonly hear that it is not fair if we do not admit every student that wishes to attend our schools, and if state funding is made available to private schools the accountability should be the same as public schools.

Admissions

As a Christian non-public school, I am often asked about how we admit students. Must families meet certain criteria in order to receive an invitation? This question is easier to answer from a standpoint of what would disqualify a family.

1. Faith is our primary reason for denying families. If families intend to enroll students, but cannot offer any applicable testimony, no church home, or actively oppose Christian ideals – they are denied. The mission of our school really focuses on two key areas: knowing each student so that we can challenge each according to their abilities with a level of rigor that will spur educational growth, and to share the Gospel every day to spur spiritual growth.
2. Available space. Just as a public school can and will deny open enrolled students once the physical space has all been utilized. Non-publics do not have a defined district and thus may deny admission once a class is full.

The truth for us is that over 80% of our revenue comes from collection of tuition. It is our goal to have a full school of tuition paying families. We have students that are denied, but this is a very small number.

A common misconception that I hear from families interested in attending my school are that students with disabilities are not admitted. We admit many students with disabilities, but because we do not receive state funding we are limited in resources and ability to meet the needs of all students. In certain rare cases, we have shared with parents that a public school would be capable of offering additional needed services that would be best for the child. We have students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, students on the autism spectrum, and a wide range of learners.

Once we have admitted students, they are our students, and we exhaust our resources to find a successful outcome. I ask that the state of North Dakota take the same viewpoint. The students at Our Redeemer's Christian School are North Dakota students in which families have made the choice to pay tuition. Our request is simple, provide the financial support to educate all students residing in North Dakota. This bill requests a modest dollar amount, much less than what public schools receive via state aide.

Accountability

North Dakota public schools have different measures of accountability than non-public schools. Public school leaders point to the differences in open meeting laws and school board century code, being accountable to the state within their budgets, and student test scores. Non-public schools are not part of these same accountability standards, but we are held to a different standard. The families that are willing to make a financial investment in their child's K-12 education hold the school very accountable. Our parents are also our customers, and there are very high expectations that are communicated daily. Our school is held accountable by 175 parents that are very aware of what is happening within the school at all times.

Summary

We are different than public schools because of faith and funding. We are similar to public schools in that we are educating students and preparing them for the world after high school. Our teachers are licensed through the ESPB the same way public school teachers are licensed. Our students are assessed and found to be learning at expected rates. Our Redeemer's Christian School has been successful without state funding, but this bill is not for the school. This bill is right move for the families desiring a choice in education and supporting the education of every ND student.

Respectfully,

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