

Good Evening-My name is Mary Rugola-Dye. I am a retired 35 year veteran teacher of our great public schools. I am also a proud graduate and now a school board member of the Mount Vernon City School System.

I have a unique perspective on the issue of private and public education funding. I myself attended a parochial school until my senior year. I also am a parent of a son who attended the same parochial school through 8th grade. Both of these circumstances were due to religious beliefs. My tuition was paid by my family. My son's tuition was paid for by me, a single parent.

What happened when my son and I were thrust into the public school system? Absolutely incredible and wonderful opportunities.

So, I am here as an advocate for one of the pillars of our republic: our great public schools

Throughout my career, I witnessed many changes in our public schools. Some of them were beneficial and successful for our children. Some were not.

One of the most egregious of these changes is the expansion of the voucher system.

Our tax payers have entrusted the levy money they voted on to use at the local level for children in our great public schools. They expect us to educate children with the resources from their wallets...not to push their hard earned money to private and or religious institutions.

If the state wishes to provide assistance to children in a failed school system then the state needs to use state money....not the money from school systems who cannot afford the loss of local tax payer revenue.

The state also needs to remove the reliance on a single score on a single state report card to determine that a school is failing.

Something that many people may not be aware of is this: our great public schools are succeeding. We are not failing. That is the big lie that has circulated ever since high stakes testing took over the majority of our curriculum. Our children are succeeding. We are graduating highly qualified students who are focused and prepared for the next step in their lives. Are we perfect? Of course not. But what large organization is perfect?

Robbing Peter to pay Paul is not a successful strategy for any large organization and it is certainly not a successful strategy for our great public schools. For the sake of one of the pillars of our republic and for the sake of our children, I urge you all to adopt the changes contained in SB89.

Thomas Jefferson had some thoughts about the importance of a general knowledge among the people: "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves, (A)nd if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of Constitutional power.."

I believe in our great public schools, one of the pillars of our republic. If the pillar called public education begins to crumble, this republic, this great experiment in democracy, may fail. It is up to us...all of us...to ensure that future generations have the education necessary to ensure the continuance of this great nation.

Thank you for your kind attention.