

Good afternoon Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee.

My name is Sharla Elton, and I am Superintendent of Heritage Christian School in Canton. I want to start by thanking you for your incredible work for children and families in Ohio. I am here today to express support for H.B. 11.

The love of a parent for a child is one of the strongest forces in the world. The concept of House Bill 11 is simple: let parents choose what works best for their child. We all pay taxes, and we all have different needs and priorities. The fact is there is no one-size-fits-all model that works for every child. All schools can talk about their success stories, but even amazing schools aren't a great fit for every learner. This is why wide educational options are important.

Individuals can use food vouchers at a variety of groceries, Pell grants can be used at private and public colleges, and Medicare and Medicaid recipients can pick their care providers. The argument has been made that these public funds are made available because these populations are vulnerable.

I would argue that children – all children – are also a vulnerable population. It is why we invest in taxpayer-funded education for all children in the first place. Taxpayers don't just pay to educate children in poverty, we pay for all children because they are children. Educating children is already an expense - not a new expense. And it only makes sense to apply the tax funding at the place where the child is actually being educated. This bill has the power to make that common sense statement a reality in Ohio. Why invest in education, and then write a prescription - that a child takes daily for 13 years of their life - that doesn't address their ailments? We can change that! We can give all families school choice.

Some opponents are concerned about families choosing a school with a faith perspective. But many schools have different perspectives: whether character values, a STEM focus, advanced education, Montessori magnet schools and more. If we are all teaching the Ohio State Standards, the scholarships are paying for the instruction of those Ohio standards. If schools serve parents (tax payers) who want other things on top, why is that a concern? It should be celebrated that different schools exist to meet the diverse needs of our population. Making one system try to be everything to everyone results in the fighting we see today.

Teachers need school choice too. The National Education Association reports¹ that "55% of educators are thinking about leaving the profession earlier than they had planned." Another report² says that "Nearly 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years." Teachers should not be largely bound to one type of system; instead, teachers need new learning environments to do their best work. H.B. 11 allows these new environments to grow for teachers who are looking for something different.

I've heard concerns from legislators about the ability of nonpublic schools to handle more capacity, or difficult students, or students who are behind academically, or students who transfer in and out. I'm happy to discuss each concern, but I can broadly tell you this: We non-public schools are already doing

¹ <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession>

² <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/respect/teaching-profession-facts.doc>

this work. We know how to adjust for capacity changes, we handle difficult students and situations regularly, and we are nimble.

Non-public schools have the benefit of flexibility. Without the layers of bureaucracy that have plagued many systems, we can quickly adjust to rising enrollment, curriculum that isn't meeting the needs of students, change our staffing mix, and better align resources to meet the Ohio state learning standards. Our very existence depends on meeting the needs of parents and educating students well. We are ready for House Bill 11.

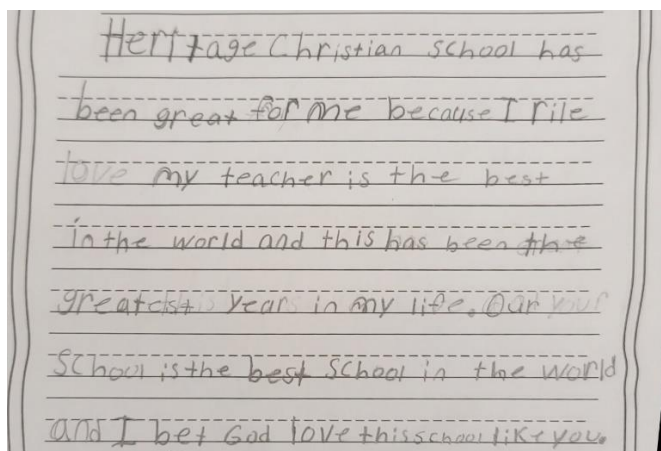
So many stereotypes exist about nonpublic schools, and I'd like to challenge some today by telling you about our school, Heritage Christian School in Canton. Nearly all of our students attend using one of the Ohio Scholarships – more than 95% of our students. Our free and reduced rate is 82%, making us a free food building, serving every child breakfast and lunch daily.

We are proud to report that Heritage Christian School is more multi-cultural than the local public school district with a beautifully diverse campus. 26% of our students identify as Black, 23% Hispanic, 22% Multiracial, and 30% White. 26 of our students qualify as English Learners. This is nearly 12% of our student body, almost triple the rate of the public district's percentage of language learners. And we are scoring better on Ohio tests despite the fact that Heritage receives about half of what the local public school receives in taxpayer funding. The public school spends \$10,085 in state and local taxpayer funds per child, compared to most of Heritage's students receiving \$5,500 in EdChoice scholarship funding.

In 13 of 14 Ohio state tests from the Spring, Heritage children outperformed the local public district and the similar public district comparison group. We administer the Ohio State test to all of our students, including students on IEPs and 504 plans, and this data is pulled directly from the TIDE Ohio testing portal. I will say that we want our scores even higher.

But, on average, whatever the local public district proficiency rate is, Heritage's proficiency is 21 points higher. In Grade 4 math, Heritage had 76% of the class proficient, compared to 23% of the public school, and 34% in the similar public district comparison group. In Grade 7 English Language Arts, 59% of the class was proficient compared to 28% in the public school and 34.7% in a similar district. Better results per taxpayer dollar is great. But even better are little lives truly changed forever. Don't take my word for it, here are some words from our students themselves:

Grade 2 Students:



Heritage Christian school has been
good for me because our teach
ers are awesome and they
do so much for us and
we get to have fun.

Grade 5 letters:

Heritage Christian School made a positive difference to me by not getting called names like fat, I'm 3,000 pounds. This school made me learn more math, bible, and reading. I learned how to not hurt myself when I'm mad, and I also learned how to calm down. When I was in second grade I was trying to committing suicide. Hcs is the only school I have been to in what is a very strict Heritage school. You're not allowed to get on games except for the games that are appropriate. Also the games that your teacher gives you. If you lie and lie and lie, sneak and steal you might get kicked out of the school. If you also tried to get in a fight you may get a school suspension. If you want to come here you better learn respect, responsibility and thankfulness. I was learning how to do grammar and punctuation. I wish I could be here for high school, middle school and elementary.

Heritage Christian School changed my life because I feel more safe here than my last school, now no one is bullying me. I don't have to worry about any problems. I feel safe here. They are so nice. I love being here. We get to help the people who need help like we made bags for an organization called compassion delivered. We made place mats for them. I love to help others. We get to go on field trips this year. We went to the McKinley Museum. In the spring we are going to go see White Bird. We get extra people to help us. I go to math and reading. We get candy if we do good and we have a chart and if you fill a row you get extra candy if you fill the chart, you get something when they go to the store. We get to worship Jesus with good clothes and we get to dance to Jesus. I love dancing so I dance and we have free lunch that makes me happy because I don't have a lot of money. We wear really nice clothes. It has the symbol I love our logo. I like how we can wear jeans on Friday. I like how they look out for our safety.

HCS has made a difference by making my first friends here. I was nervous when I first came here but now I'm confident. I am good at division and multiplication. I feel comfortable here, and in a safe place. The field trips are amazing. The food is free and good. The school has taught me to be responsible to get my homework in. This is how HCS made a positive impact on my life.

first things first I want to say a few things about this school ever since I came here, so the first thing I wanna talk about is that I use to have anger issues in my last school and I really could not control it and it made me sad that I could not help myself, bt then when my mom decided to take me to this school that's when my mood change to always mad to pretty happy. I was so happy being here and my mood really changed since I came here, then when our teacher named Mrs. Ousley really helped me out because everytime I needed help she helped me do it and always thinks I'm pretty good at doing tests. Second ever since i came here I made some pretty good friends here too and they are fun to be around and we always help each other out, we were best friends so much that we even played video games after school so we can still have fun, so again thank you Heritage Christian School because without you I wouldn't have met these great friends that I still play today. Last but not least ever since I came here we had so many cool activities that I don't barely do at my old school, we always have pizza parties, ice cream parties and even field trips, not to mention the fields trips are the best because we went to this outer space building and it was pretty fun, and we were by this lake and saw a big ship too while we were there, I also love God and worshipping him our creator and since I love church and God and the bible and since my mom and I love God my mom wanted me to be here and I love being here matter fact, I love Chapel because we always learn more about the bible and what God has to say to spread the word to the whole world to bring love and joyness and humble, and that is all I have to say.

This is why I think Heritage Christian School is really fun and more kids should come here a lot because it sure is a Christian School thank you for reading this see you on the flipside.

Heritage Christian School has made a positive difference in my life because I have made good friends here back at my old school. I had friends but they treated other people in a "unique" way. They bullied a lot of people badly so it made a bad impact on me and my behavior. But coming here was a good option and the friends I have now are one of the kindest people i could ever meet and help me through stuff that was tough.

Another positive difference in my life because of heritage is the teachers they are great and very helpful like my teacher Mrs Ousley taught me a lot of stuff like on the first day of school i didn't even know my math facts like 2×7 but now i know most of my math facts and when i needed help understanding something i got that help that i needed.

My last positive difference that heritage did in my life was to help me to be responsible, before I never had my stuff like I was always missing something but now I can be responsible and get my stuff ready and be ready for the day and I can bring my homework on time and make sure my computer is charged.

Grade 8:

Heritage Christian school has affected me in a positive way by helping me grow my academic mind and the staff and students here have helped me form into a good person. This school has affected me and helped me develop in a wonderful way embrace growth and learning new things. I have learned new skills in all my subjects because of this I have learned so many good things.

You have the power to allow all Ohio children to find their best academic fit. I want to invite you to come and visit Heritage Christian School in Canton anytime. Thank you for your support of House Bill 11. I welcome any questions that you have.