

Ross County Christian Academy

Providing an excellent education program for each child in a creative, challenging and Christ centered environment



Good afternoon Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is Dr. Valerie Jones and I serve as the Superintendent of Ross County Christian Academy in Chillicothe, Ohio. Our school educates almost 500 students, birth to 12th grade, from Ross County and surrounding areas. We stand opposed to HB 407.

While accountability in education is crucial, HB 407 raises several significant concerns that could have adverse effects on the educational landscape in Ohio. First, the proposed monitoring and reporting measures threaten the autonomy and unique educational philosophies that private schools offer. One of the primary reasons parents choose private schools is the ability to select an institution that aligns with their educational values and preferences. Private schools often operate with distinct missions, pedagogical approaches, and curricula that differ from public schools. While we abide by the Operating Standards for Ohio Schools, increased state monitoring and reporting requirements could lead to a reduction in diversity of these schools, pressuring them to conform to a standardized model that undermines their unique qualities and reduces the diversity of educational options available to families. Ed Choice monies are NOT paid to private schools. Those funds are paid to the families and they choose private education to have greater control over their children's learning environment and to ensure that it aligns with their values and expectations. The Peechers are one of these families at Ross County Christian Academy. The Peechers have 5 children, all who have attended or are attending RCCA. Mom, Cara, and dad, Gabe, are both educators, one in the public schools and one in private schools. They chose RCCA to be their educational provider using the EdChoice vouchers given to them. They chose RCCA because we were able to give their children the education that they desired. What's more, two years ago, the Peechers became a foster family and took in 2 brothers, both who had experienced tremendous trauma at the hands of their parents. Both were non-verbal and suffered drastically from trauma-response behaviors. And yet, due to the individualized and mission-minded education RCCA provided them, the boys are now thriving and are being adopted by the Peechers this summer. Increased state monitoring could be perceived as an overreach into private family decisions, undermining parental choice and autonomy. It is essential to respect the rights of parents, like the Peechers, to decide the best educational setting for their children without undue interference from the state.

The increased oversight of HB 407 will impose significant administrative burdens on private schools. Many private institutions operate with limited staff and resources, and the additional

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requirements for detailed reporting and compliance could divert time and resources away from their core mission of providing quality education. As Superintendent, I carry out many tasks on a daily basis that one would not find a person in my position doing in a public setting. Our CFO does not have a staff such as a Payroll Clerk, Accounts Receivable, etc. as public institutions do. We wear many hats due to necessity. Small schools, in particular, may struggle to meet these demands, potentially leading to financial strain or even closure. This would reduce educational choices for parents and students, counteracting the benefits that a diverse range of schooling options provides.

HB 407's requirements concerning the reporting admissions policies are unnecessary and burdensome. Private schools, as other entities, are required to follow non-discriminatory admissions procedures. A private school's non-discriminatory admissions policy is a fundamental aspect of its mission to provide equitable education opportunities. By adhering to this policy, the school not only complies with legal requirements but also promotes a diverse and inclusive learning environment where all students can succeed. This commitment to non-discrimination helps foster a community based on respect, equality, and mutual understanding, ultimately enriching the educational experience for everyone involved. Unnecessary required reporting will just add to the lengthy list of tasks that our limited staff and administration perform.

Finally, HB407's requirement of comparing local schools' performance to a private school's performance is not valid or reliable. While standardized test scores provide some insights into student performance, they are not a comprehensive measure of educational quality, especially when comparing public and private schools. The fundamental differences in student populations, resource availability, educational approaches, and testing environments make such comparisons inherently flawed and potentially misleading. Rather than relying on simplistic comparisons of test scores, we should focus on more individualized, holistic approaches to evaluating and improving educational outcomes for all students. Private schools allow families to choose the best assessment to fit the needs of their student(s). HB 407 would take that choice away. Private schools' resource disparities play a critical role in student performance and make it inappropriate to compare standardized test scores directly between public and private schools.

While accountability in education is important, the proposed increased monitoring and reporting of private schools present several substantial drawbacks. These measures threaten the autonomy



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and diversity of private education, impose undue administrative burdens, and infringe on parental rights. Instead, we should focus on supporting the unique contributions of private schools while ensuring quality through existing accreditation processes and fostering a collaborative approach to education policy. I urge you to oppose HB 407 for this rationale—your support is appreciated.



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