

Good morning Ohio House Finance Education Committee. I am Ashton Sommers. For most of my life, I attended public school in Louisville Ohio. Louisville is a high performing school district according to the state. From as early as I could remember until high school, I hated school, and like most kids I always counted down the days until the weekend. I always had and maintained bad grades throughout school, and I knew college was never a route I would take in life.

In public school, I had teachers who had classrooms that were at capacity limits, and I was just another student. The most teachers knew about their students was a first and maybe a last name. I never could learn this way, and I felt out of place and school became something I didn't care about. The packets of homework and scanned tests showed that I was a bad student, hard to teach, and overall unintelligent.

After almost failing my freshman year, and getting into trouble often, I was moved to a private school. At first, I hated the idea of a new school, and new teachers. I was even more upset when I found out about the strict dress code, & strict teaching practices. I thought how could I be successful here when I couldn't even maintain decent grades in a public school.

I quickly realized the main difference in schools was the teachers. The private school was farther from home, an older building, older desks, older bathrooms, lunchroom & felt like I was going to school in the 80s with how out dated the school was.

It took me a full year to understand and embrace the one on one attention I got at Heritage Christian. I wasn't just another kid in the classroom, but someone who they wanted make a positive impact on. I remember asking questions in public school, and it always felt like you were bothering the teachers and interrupting their day. Which I somewhat understand as some classrooms would have 40+ people.

The teachers at my small, private school gave me the time and effort to instill strong religious and educational beliefs that truly changed the route of my life. I was not a person who succeeded in a large, factory styled school. The teachers truly cared about me and my future. They would learn everything about us and use that to adjust our views to become successful, and educated students. I always knew they were under paid and they were truly there on their own desire to have a positive impact on students who needed it the most. They care about us more than any teacher I ever came across in 10 years of public school.

My same high school, Louisville High School would later go on a teacher related strike. They showed me and many others that their main objection is their paycheck. They all gave up and stopped teaching their students over a pay raise that was denied. This is one of the highest paying schools in Stark County. Many of my friends suffered grades dropping, and the confusion of having substitute teachers for an entire year of high

school. I was so lucky to be at Heritage Christian, who didn't care about the pay but cared about the impact they have on their students. They would never turn their backs on us and neglect teaching us for their own financial gain.

At this moment I realize the public school that failed me and many others, was the actual failure itself. I was not a failure, and I took advantage of my private school. I had many conversations with my teachers, beyond class material. Conversations about life, business, and more helped me grow as an individual and gave me advice I would never have found in public school. I found myself succeeding in my grades, and I went from a failing student who constantly getting into fights and trouble to a strong student who had a strong foundation in Christ.

Five years later, I own a business with 6 employees, and gross well over seven figures a year. I would never have guessed the success and happiness I would have this quickly after high school. My private school truly set the tone for my life and I credit all of my success in business and life to Heritage Christian, who cared more about the future of their students than the number on their pay check.

Thank you for supporting school choice in Ohio.