

November 15, 2024

SB 293

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 293. My name is Tim Closson and I am from Allen County."

I have been in education for 38 years. I was an elementary school principal for 26.5 years in three different elementary schools (Bluffton, Ada, & Wayne Trace-Grover Hill) in three different counties (Allen, Hardin, & Paulding). I have seen the devastating effects of the breaking down of the family unit. I have observed the positive effects of a Release Time program in Bluffton Schools (100 years). Their program is not a distraction but is part of the school schedule. I believe that every school should have the opportunity to host a Release Time program.

The major issue I see is that school officials (including board members) are overriding and denying students access to these programs. Many parents want their children to participate in religious instruction during the school day. A 2024 RMG Research poll revealed that 76% of voters support moral and character education for public school students.

It is a fact that in some districts in Ohio parental rights are under threat. Two Ohio districts have rescinded their release time policy even when parents showed interest and students were enrolled (nearly 300 students) in release time programs. Parents should have authority to decide if religious education is part of their child's schooling.

If the Ohio Department of Education has been stressing the importance of best practices, then why is this not considered a best practice? The positives of religious instruction is backed by decades of research that indicate that religious instruction positively affects student behavior, academic performance, and mental health. A recent independent study by Thomas P. Miller & Associates found that LifeWise programs improve attendance and behavior in participating schools.

Parent Choice Is the right approach. Parents should have the authority to decide if religious education is part of their child's schooling, particularly as many lack access to private religious schools or homeschooling options. SB 293 makes religious education accessible to all students, including those in public schools, without burdening the school or taxpayer.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to advocate for Senate Bill 293.

Sincerely, Tim Closson