

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 293

The Ohio Senate Education Committee

Monday, November 18, 2024

Kristie Reighard, Ohio Educator 1997-2021

Member-elect, Ohio Board of Education, District 1

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony today. My name is Kristie Reighard (she/her/hers). I am a resident of Swanton in Fulton County, a parent to three public school educated adult children, and a former science teacher and principal in Ohio. I continue to serve Ohio Public Schools as an Ed Tech Coordinator with a national company and am the member elect for the State Board of Education, District 1. I am writing today to express my opposition to Senate Bill 293.

In general, I oppose the RTRI policy as it is currently implemented in most Ohio schools. In the late 1980s, when I attended Rossford High School, a small group of students used the RTRI policy without major interruption to the school day. They came in 30 minutes late on Wednesdays, without being recruited with fliers and tables at open houses, without red shirts, without candy, and without proselytism. Teachers did not have to sort students into those who were going and those who were staying. Teachers did not have to answer questions from students who wanted to go but couldn't, and why they couldn't have candy. Teachers didn't lose valuable academic time because a large majority of the class attended the offsite RTRI program that was offered as a rotation in the Related Arts Rotation Schedule (Central Local Schools 2024-2025).

Specifically, requiring districts to adopt an RTRI policy causes undue harm.

1. **Local Control:** Currently, district school boards in Ohio assume local control in the decision to adopt an RTRI policy. Ohio public school boards have a long history of local control over this and similar educational matters. HB 445 will reduce local control over a community's governance of their standard of high-quality education. Requiring school districts to adopt an RTRI policy will go against the choice of several Ohio districts that wish to maintain a strict separation of church and state and prioritize a safe, equitable education for all students, not just their Christian ones.

2. **Religious Organizations:** Even as the current law is written and implemented, I am worried about other so-called religious organizations, especially The Hellion Academy of Independent Learning (HAIL) sponsored by the Satanic Temple and Reason Alliance, infiltrating Ohio schools, much like what is happening in Tennessee. HAIL offers students an alternative to Christian RTRI programs. Passing HB 445 will encourage and make it easier for groups like HAIL to operate in Ohio public school districts.

3. Impact on Educators: I am speaking out on behalf of teachers and administrators who are silenced in opposition to RTRI policy by their district policy. Educators are leaving the profession at alarming rates, and college and university teacher education program enrollments are dropping significantly across the nation. Dealing with another disruption to class schedules and the aftermath of RTRI situations, such as non attending students being ostracized by attending students and non-attending students being told they are sinners and will go to hell because they don't follow God's rules, is not making it any easier for educators and is not attracting new graduates to the profession.

4. Contradictory Policies: With significant increases in chronic absenteeism in recent years and HB 250 being signed into law in May 2024 to reduce cell phone distractions in the classroom, the requirement for districts to adopt an RTRI policy, which causes disruptions to the school day, is contradictory to the larger picture of what Ohio needs to do and is doing to improve Ohio public education.

Ohio's taxpayers, districts, educators, and children deserve better! I urge you to listen carefully to your constituents, especially educators and those fighting for ALL of Ohio's students educated by our public education system, and adopt laws to further inclusivity, equity, and advancement of Ohio Public Education. Senate Bill 293 is not one that will do this, so I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote NO.