



OHIO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NETWORK

A Network of Center for Christian Virtue

HB445 Proponent Testimony
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Troy McIntosh, Executive Director
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is Troy McIntosh and I serve as Executive Director of the Ohio Christian Education Network, a network of 177 Evangelical and Catholic schools across the state. Because of the proven benefits of religious release time education and to ensure that Ohio's students are offered their constitutionally protected right to attend such programs, we urge you to favorably refer HB445 to the House floor for passage.

Ohio law (ORC 3313.6022) currently permits districts to authorize release time for religious education for public school students under certain conditions. However, students are being shut out of this opportunity as some districts are deciding not to adopt a release time policy. This bill would remedy this problem for students by making this provision directive rather than permissive. There are a number of good policy reasons to do this.

1. **Public school parents are increasingly interested in release time programs.** One release time provider has grown to serve nearly 200 school districts and 320 schools this fall. This is a greater than 100% increase in less than five years. As many parents and students are finding their public school to be an increasingly adversarial to their faith, release time programs offer them an opportunity to gain some measure of control over their child's education.
2. **Release time programs have a measurably positive effect on school culture and dynamics.** In a [report issued](#) by Thomas P. Miller and Associates, a national consulting firm based in Indianapolis, a positive correlation was found between a release-time program and increased student attendance rates. In the first year of the program at a school, for every ten percent increase in program participation, the school attendance rate improved by 7% on average. Additionally, it found a corresponding reduction in disciplinary issues, including a 9-incident reduction in in-school suspensions for each year of the program and a 4 incident reduction in out-of-school suspensions for each year of the program. In an era in which attendance and discipline are increasingly the focus of school improvement efforts, this is a notable effect. Also of note is the research indicated the likelihood of academic performance increases as well, although the sample size was too small to draw definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, the initial data is promising.



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3. **The Ohio Constitution itself proclaims that, “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being essential to good government, it shall be the duty of the general assembly . . . to encourage schools and the means of instruction.** Passage of HB445 is one manner in which the GA can uphold this constitutional directive without actively getting involved with religion in any way. In fact, the release time requirements include these provisions:
 - a. Students must obtain parent or guardian permission to participate.
 - b. The program takes place off-site and not on school grounds.
 - c. Transportation to the program is the responsibility of the parents or sponsor.
 - d. The sponsor assumes all liability.
 - e. No public funds may be expended on any aspect of the program.
 - f. The student may not miss any core curriculum class.

4. **Finally, parents should have the right and authority to direct the education of their child without a local school district blocking them from doing so.** This is a first principle that should be recognized by responsible government.

I will leave you with the perspective of an urban elementary school principal who allows for release time, although more such testimonials are available in the report I linked earlier in my testimony.

“[This release-time program] has made a positive impact on student attendance, behavior and social emotional well-being. It provides confidence and a sense of belonging for students. They have learned compassion. Our school’s daily attendance goal is 90% or above each day. Consistently, on the days our students participate in [the program], our 4th and 5th grades meet or surpass our goal. Disciplinary infractions for students who participate have decreased by 50%.”

There are many reasons for this bill to become law. We urge this committee to favorably refer it to the full House for passage.