

Parental Rights in Education

We all know the old saying that it takes a whole village to raise a child. The saying could not be more true in the context of our education system where it is critically important to have parents, educators, and administrators working together in partnership so that our children have the best educational experience possible. Parents are our first educators. They model speech, behavior, faith, values and a myriad of other big and small things throughout each day. In education, the message to parents too often has been “leave it to the professionals.” And frankly, we have many parents who have disengaged themselves from the process of their children’s education because of this message or because they feel like their voice is not being heard.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that: "*The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.*" - *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925)

This bill seeks to put into law what we know to be true: that parents are the primary people responsible for the education of their children. With rights come responsibilities, and parents have a responsibility to be involved in the education of their children. This bill puts parents on notice that they need to re-engage and be an active participant in the process.

If nothing else, the adoption of the common core standards in Idaho has heightened the awareness of parents to what is happening in the classroom and has spurred many to become more actively involved in their local schools. More and more parents are actively seeking out

information about curriculum and material choices, methods of instruction, and types of testing. Educators can capitalize on this interest by finding ways to involve parents, answer their questions, and create a culture of collaborative partnership.

This bill would require school districts to establish a parental involvement policy that would promote and encourage such involvement. The plan would need to include elements such as how to improve parent participation, a process to inform parents about curriculum and material choices, and a process by which a parent may object to learning materials or activities they deem harmful for their children.

These requirements are not new nor are they onerous. Many school districts already have plans in place and are working diligently to actively involve parents. In fact, Title 1 schools are already required to have parental involvement plans. This bill is not intended for school districts to go through a duplicative effort if they already have existing plans. I would like to share with you a best practice that is occurring in one of the local school districts I represent.

The Kuna School District has a parental involvement plan. Each of the schools within the district has a parent advisory team that is active in reviewing curriculum materials and in providing a communication link between the school and the parents. The district also takes a proactive approach to curriculum planning and makes any new materials that the district is considering purchasing on display in the schools for several weeks prior to purchase and parents can provide feedback regarding the potential use of the materials. Teachers make their material lists available in a variety of ways to parents, whether that be on their individual

websites or in direct communication to parents. Because of the proactive approach the district has taken to curriculum and material choices and planning, they have had few requests over the years from parents objecting to materials being used in the classroom. In addition, the district has conducted parent nights to help parents understand new methods of teaching math to help address concerns that parents brought forward regarding the implementation of new standards and methods.

While there are many districts doing great things in this arena and establishing best practices for other districts to model, there are examples of schools not recognizing a parent's right in relation to the education of their children. You have been provided with a packet showing e-mail excerpts (some of which you have received through your own email) from many parents and teachers in support of this bill because they have direct experience with this issue. If I may Mr. Chairman, I would like to read a few of these examples.

We are not breaking new ground with this legislation. At least 14 other states have adopted similar legislation related to parental rights in education. In addition, many schools are doing this great work already

Article 9, Section 1 of our state Constitution identifies that it is the legislature's responsibility to establish and maintain a general, uniform, and thorough system of public, free common schools. It is our duty to establish good sound public policy.

What this bill is not: this bill is not about having parents request individual specific curriculum for their children or about violating our constitutional responsibility to provide a uniform and

thorough system of public education. This bill is not about creating an adversarial relationship between parents and educators. It is about parents and teachers working together utilizing their own unique abilities and perspectives to achieve the best education for our children.

Idaho statute has been silent on this matter, and it is time to end the silence and affirm parental rights in education. Where the legislature is silent, the courts will weigh in without the benefit of knowing where we stand. By supporting this bill, we can show support for both our parents and our educators in acknowledging and advancing this unique collaborative partnership in regards to the education of our children.