

PARENTAL RIGHTS PROTECTION ACT | SENATE BILL 996
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2022

Chair Argall, Minority Chair Street, and Senators of the State Government Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Alex Nester, and I'm the political director of PDE Action. We are a nonpartisan policy organization working to reclaim schools from divisive political activism through policy reform. One of our top issues is parents' rights. We believe that parents' rights should be a nonpartisan issue. And so, I'm here today to share our support for Senate Bill 996, the Parental Rights Protection Act.

This act codifies existing state and federal law. It states, simply, that parents have the fundamental right to direct the upbringing, education, and care of their children.

I ask those in this room who might disagree with that simple statement: If parents are not the first and foremost people responsible for the health and wellbeing of their child, then who is?

Last year, I spoke with a few parents who discovered that their children started transitioning sexes at school without their knowledge. One mother told me at the time:

"I can't protect him," she said. "I have no right."

This is a sentiment that's been shared repeatedly with Parents Defending Education. School administrators all over the country, including in Pennsylvania, have decided that parents should be excluded from vital conversations about their child's education and wellbeing. I would like to share a few stories from parents and children that attest to the importance of legislation like Senate Bill 996.

- Parents in Tredyffrin/Easttown Schools, just outside of Philadelphia, spent two years filing Right to Know requests with their district to review QUOTE equity-focused training materials for teachers and students. The district repeatedly said that parents did not have the right to review the materials, which were released this past June. Parents found that materials used during teacher training discussed QUOTE whiteness and "white culture" which includes elements such as "hard work," and "the nuclear family."
- Officials in South Middleton Schools, just a few miles away from here, ignored parents' concerns about a "diversity, equity, and inclusion" committee their district created in 2020.
 - As is often the case with today's "diversity" task forces, members discussed divisive race ideology, including "imperial and colonial dimensions of culture;" intersectionality and "antiracism." These discussions flew in the face of parents' concerns over the divisive nature of such ideology.

- The committee began developing curriculum changes in 2021. Parents spoke up once again. Instead of addressing these concerns, the members simply noted that parents made them feel QUOTE “frustrated”
- Last month, Parents Defending Education uncovered the Colonial School District’s Gender Support Plan documents. The plan asks if a child’s parents are QUOTE “aware of and support” his or her decision to transition. Parents are merely one of several options of adults to include on the QUOTE team supporting the student’s transition.
 - Several other school districts—Pittsburgh, Cheltenham, Great Valley, Norristown Area, and Northeast Bradford—have similar policies.

These are just three of nearly two dozen incidents that Parents Defending Education has documented from Pennsylvania.

We ask, barring all moral judgment on modern race and gender ideology: why must parents be excluded from conversations about their child’s education and wellbeing?

Parents were the first to sound the alarm bells about the harmful effects that months or years-long school closures had on their children’s academic performance and mental health. But experts, teachers union top brass, and corporate media drowned them out and demanded that schools remain closed in the name of “safety,” long after we knew that the Covid-19 did not impact children in the same way it affected the elderly.

According to the New York Times, students lost twenty years of progress in reading and math during the pandemic. This decline spans all races and income levels, however, school closures harmed black and hispanic students, as well as low-income communities, the most.

QUOTE: “In math, Black students lost 13 points, compared with five points among white students, widening the gap between the two groups. Research has documented the profound effect school closures had on low-income students and on Black and Hispanic students, in part because their schools [were more likely to continue remote learning for longer periods of time](#).”

“The setbacks could have powerful consequences for a generation of children who must move beyond basics in elementary school to thrive later on.”

Senate Bill 996 affirms something we’ve known throughout history, but the past two years have demonstrated: Parents know what’s best for their children, and it is both their right and responsibility to care for them.