



Testimony

HB 1772 – Regarding voluntary participation in the WASL by students enrolled in private schools.
House Education Committee,
February 16, 2007

Good afternoon Representative Quall and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Kay Purcell. I am in my tenth year as principal of St. Rose Catholic School in Longview. I am here today to represent the Washington State Catholic Conference and the Catholic schools in Washington State and to ask for your support for House Bill 1772.

My background includes experience in both private and public schools in Washington. The year before I started at St. Rose I was a curriculum specialist in South Kitsap School District with responsibility for coordinating the WASL for the school district. For several years prior to that I was a 7th grade teacher there.

The WASL has made a difference in Washington State. It has changed instruction and set new standards for our students. It has challenged our teachers to be accountable for student achievement and skill sets that make a difference in their success.

If the WASL is a good thing for our students and improves teaching and learning then it makes sense that it is good for the students in our state's private schools as well as public. At St. Rose our students take the WASL. From my experience, for our students and their families it would be educationally irresponsible not to offer an opportunity for our students to participate in the 4th and 7th grade in a test which will determine if they will graduate from high school, even though we bear the substantial cost (our current cost is \$29 per student).

At my school, like many others across the state, many families choose a private K-8 experience for their children. Some of the reasons may be passing on their faith, desiring smaller classes, or more parental control and involvement. In many communities a private K-8 opportunity exists but students will matriculate to a public high school. Students who come into those high schools without being exposed to the content and format of the WASL are at a significant disadvantage. These students should not be impacted in their academic career because their parents chose an educational alternative to the public schools that met their family's needs.

This bill is beneficial to the entire educational community. It would make it possible for schools that chose to provide an opportunity for this experience for their students. Currently the cost is prohibitive for many schools. For others, like mine, that participate, it takes precious resources that could be used on curriculum materials or staff to support student learning.

At St. Rose we are very proud that 100% of our fourth graders have met the standard in reading since 2003. We are also proud that we have students who speak only Spanish at home yet they have met the standards in all areas of the WASL. These students are being set up for success in high school and beyond. This opportunity should be available for all private school students.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions.