



MEETING NOTES

Meeting Notes are not official until voted on by the Board of Education at its following Regular Meeting.

- A1 President called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
- A2 Members present: Mrs. Crowley, Mrs. Long, Mrs. Murdoch, Mr. Perry, and Mr. Vorst
- A3 The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

B PROGRAMS / PRESENTATIONS

- B1 Embrace, Empower, Inspire Award Winners

For our first presentation tonight, we have our first winners of the embrace, empower and inspire award for the new school year.

Good evening everyone. My name is Corey Kindl, the Executive Director of Curriculum for the district. This evening's first embrace, empower and inspire award goes to Dr. Kim Kembitzky, Teacher Leader. She has been an educator for 36 years, twenty-six of which have been in our district as a math teacher at Davidson, a department facilitator, and in the last eight years, a teacher leader for secondary math. Having worked alongside her for many years, I know her efforts are impactful for our students and the teachers she supports daily.

I'd like to share a couple of excerpts from her nomination. Kim is one of the most thoughtful educators I've been around and doesn't stop at her content area, which is math. Her experience across various levels of education makes her an invaluable source of instruction. Kim works countless hours to help the math department. When her name is mentioned to teachers, they always sing her praises and comment on how much she does for them. If the instructional leaders have a captain, we believe it's Dr. Kim. She's an exemplary coach and serves as an excellent role model for us to emulate. She is a support person for math teachers and works tirelessly to get them the resources they need. Her emphasis on pedagogy strengthens teachers' skills, impacting many students across our district.

I am honored and privileged to present the embrace, empower and inspire award to Dr. Kim.

Good evening, I'm Kristen Clausen, Assistant Principal at Davidson High School high, and I am here to present Jen Cooper with the embrace, empower and inspire award. Jen is a Spanish teacher at Davidson, and I'll also read a couple of excerpts from her nominations. Jen is a rock star on a daily basis, but more specifically, she coordinates our two-day freshman focus camp that takes place the week before school starts. The freshmen focus camp provides our incoming first-year students an amazing introduction to their high school career. And she does this every single year. There are hours upon hours of organization and behind-the-scenes work that go into planning for this evening and our freshman focus program. She does it all. She also prepares the lessons for our freshman-focus classroom year, where freshmen learn about topics that will help support them as they navigate their first year of high school. Jen also consistently works to better Davidson for our underrepresented student populations. Her visibility, dedication, and willingness to do the hard work makes a difference in our building. She's an outstanding

colleague and friend who exemplifies everything the wild cat way represents. I present to Jen Cooper the embrace, empower, and inspire award.

Hi, good evening. My name is Craig Vroom, and I have the privilege of being a principal at the Innovative Learning Center. Our community, our district, is every student without exception, having a building climate where all students feel welcome and included and having students and a staff that always know they have someone to turn to for all the little things and the big things. Kathy Parker-Jones, our instructional leader in the online academy, nominated Ms. Denise Shouse for this award. Denise gives countless hours every day to our students and our staff. She has a brilliant sense of humor. She loves large crowds. When the central office staff recognized her last week, Denise asked if she had to come tonight. I said, yes, you do. She hemmed and hawed. And we talked about bringing her son and daughter with her tonight. But the best part was when I reminded her that it was within her shift. Denise is our custodian and is one of a kind. Brilliant at everything. Congratulations, Denise; you embrace, empower, and inspire us all.

C ROUTINES

C1 The agenda is correct as presented.

Mr. Vorst motioned to replace the policy language in item F2 Policy JEFB, with the OSBA version of the same policy. Mrs. Murdoch seconded the motion. Mrs. Crowley asked if they could discuss this motion. Mr. Perry asked for a copy of the OSBA policy. Copies were distributed to the board members. Mr. Perry asked Mr. Vorst to walk them through the differences between the two policy versions.

Mr. Vorst stated that it seems like it's mostly semantics. There's not much difference between the two policies, and we do have the backing of OSBA and their lawyers, knowing that their version is adequate and safe for us to adopt.

Mr. Crowley asked Mr. Vorst to explain why he hadn't suggested changing the language at the first or second reading. At the second reading on August 22, on page 14 of the minutes, we agreed upon this language (*language presented for tonight's third reading and possible adoption*). And then, at the last minute, you tried to change this language at two o'clock today. Can you explain that? Mr. Vorst replied that he feels more supportive of this language. He thought about it a lot, which is the conclusion I came to and made this motion.

Mrs. Crowley stated that you had a month to think about and suggest the OSBA version, but you changed your mind at two o'clock today. So, we've been talking about this policy since March. You never once mentioned that you wanted to switch the language, and you agreed upon the language on page 14 of the minutes from last month. So, why the change? Mr. Vorst answered that he thought about it some more in between meetings, and this is what I came to feel comfortable with.

Mrs. Crowley stated that she wanted it to be clear that this policy version was just passed out to us here at the table. This is the first time I've seen this language, and I will not be accepting this language today.

Mrs. Murdoch asked if the board members wanted to discuss the differences. Mrs. Crowley stated she hadn't had time to go through it, and I would like time to look it over. I don't want to decide in two minutes, whether I will accept this language or not. And we run on transparency with our community. They do not have copies of this language and are not seeing it right now, either.

Mrs. Long stated this language was presented at the second reading. We went through this. She then asked Mrs. Murdoch to share the differences between the two versions of JEFB. Mrs. Murdoch said she didn't have her exact notes from the last time. One of the most substantive differences is that in the red line policy, we refer to the sponsoring entity, and OSBA's version uses a private entity. This change was discussed at the policy review committee meeting because NEOLA uses sponsoring entities. She thinks they're the same thing. We talked about that last time, so she's fine with either designation, and the other changes are more in format. When you look at the paragraph right under number three, it is bullet-pointed in the red line policy. So, the OSBA version says the district is not responsible for transportation to and from the place of instruction. And it goes on that whole paragraph versus the red line; that exact language is numbered in that number list instead of a paragraph. It's the same thing with the line about public funds. It is also listed as a numbered item, as opposed to written out in the paragraph in the OSBA version.

Mrs. Long added that number one strikes the building principal and the OSBA version has the building principal. Mrs. Murdoch replied yes. In number one, we do not require consent to be presented to the building principal in the red-line version. The policy committee discussion was to leave that more open and not narrow it to the building principal.

Mrs. Crowley stated that all of this should have been discussed at the second reading, and then it should have been made available to the community when the agenda went live on Friday.

Mrs. Long stated that is a motion that has been seconded. So, we will vote on whether we will replace the JEFB version from the policy review committee with the OSBA version in item F2.

Mrs. Crowley asked so what's the language of the vote? Mrs. Murdoch responded that the vote is for whether we change the agenda to vote on JEFB, OSBA version, or JEFB, red line version. Mrs. Long added that the motion is to remove the policy committee version and move forward with the OSBA version. Mrs. Crowley clarified that a "yes" vote on this motion would mean changing item F2 to the OSBA version.

Mrs. Long asked Mr. Wilson to call the roll. Mrs. Crowley voted no. Mrs. Long voted yes. Mrs. Murdoch voted yes. Mr. Perry, stated that in protestation of this being given at the last minute, he abstained. Mr. Vorst voted yes. The motion passed with 3 yea's, 1 no, and 1 abstention.

C2 The Board of Education adopted the agenda as amended.

C3 The Board of Education approved the August 2022 Treasurer's Report.

Mr. Wilson noted the variances in the revenue for the month August. We have less state revenue and that's simply because we have not received the payment for the rollback and homestead taxes which normally comes between August and October. It came in August last year. So it's just a cash timing issue.

C4 The Board of Education approved the minutes from the following meetings:

- a. August 8, 2022 – Regular Meeting
- b. August 8, 2022 – Meeting Notes
- c. August 22, 2022 – Work Session Meeting
- d. August 22, 2022 – Meeting Notes

D PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Board of Education appreciates citizen interest in meetings of the board. This place on the agenda is set aside to hear comments from visitors. When called, please go to the microphone so that remarks may be clearly heard and recorded. You must give your name and limit comments to three minutes. Comments must be respectful and professional in nature. Board members may or may not ask questions or make comments. No board member has the power or authority to act for the board; therefore, no response from an individual board member should be interpreted as an official action of the board. Portions of this meeting are being recorded.

NOTE: The audio recording of the meeting was difficult to decipher due to background noise. You may see many unfinished sentences throughout the public participation.

Brandon Ross

Good evening, everybody. Can you imagine if we didn't have to fight for our children to receive in-person education, fight for our children to see in-person instruction without a mask strapped across their beautiful faces, fight for inappropriate educational material to be removed from school grounds, fight to protect our children from sexualization within the school system that happily takes our tax money, fight for our children to feel safe, physically and mentally using the appropriate restroom, and fight for our children to participate against other children? They're in the same playing field or core as in physical capabilities.

Can you imagine the amount of time we could spend on making a difference? If we did fight, we didn't have to fight for common sense. Look around; there are a lot of people here right now. Seriously, look around. We should all be celebrating. Celebrating the successes we're having with educating our children. There shouldn't be this much tension in the room. Instead, we are fighting. And now, just recently, Hilliard City School District is on ABC news because of virtual signaling badges. That's embarrassing. Once we win because we will win, we need to take the same amount of passion and apply it to preparing our children for their futures.

There's a famous quote by John C. Maxwell. "Teamwork makes the dream work." If you don't want to be part of the dream of excellence with an education, then please get out of our way. Thank you for all the parents, especially those angry momma bears pointing for common sense. I/We all appreciate you more than you probably realize. Thank you.

Mr. Perry addressed Mr. Vorst about the time he wanted to include that all comments must be made to the board. That's why. (*Referring to the speaker addressing the crowd instead of the board.*)

Scott Merillat

Good evening board members, and thanks for the opportunity to speak on two topics. First, I am a Hilliard resident and a parent of a ninth grader at Darby. I am in support of the safe teacher badges. It makes sense that there is a QR code on the back of the badge because, after all, the answers have always been in the back of the books. Our education system is not about getting the right answer. It's about the learning process, and having that safe teacher there is the focus. So, there are over seventeen thousand students at Hilliard from 68 countries with 56 unique languages. Therefore, there's no possible way any human will know the answer to all of those questions any of those people bring forward. So, I ask because Aristotle

says that all humans, by nature, desire knowledge; we allow the teachers access to the knowledge they need and keep visibility present.

Number two, regarding the JEFB religious instruction, I'm appalled at what just happened here. I could not even find it. I needed assistance in order to even find the language because the language is not in the PCR. It's not on the meeting minutes. It's not anywhere online for me to access. And I have been working diligently to try to figure out why I have to interrupt my evening to discuss this. But, the policy just lacks guardrails. There's no safety here. There's no safety for my students coming back, hearing what's going on in these other places. There is no safety for the students leaving the schools, and there are no guardrails in this to limit an extremist religious ideology from getting approved and taking children and teaching them an extremist ideology that is not the unified all students matter approach. I could go on, but I want to thank you for hearing me and for the opportunity to speak.

Maria Bruno

Hello, my name's Maria Bruno. I am the public policy director at Equality Ohio, which is a statewide LGBTQ+ education and advocacy organization. I'm here today at the request of local parents who express concern about the growing controversy surrounding basic inclusion efforts, including allowing teachers to wear a badge that expresses support for LGBTQ+ students by having just two simple words, I'm here. In a time when LGBTQ+ students are constantly forced to defend their right to simply exist and be left alone, leadership from trusted adults like teachers and district leaders is invaluable. It's a shame that even small actions in support of LGBTQ+ youth have now become political lightning rods. And that once again, LGBTQ+ youth are put in the middle of adult's walls. I'm here in solidarity and support for the students, faculty, staff, and community members who are standing up for inclusion and safety for all Hilliard students. I'm also here to be a resource for this board regarding any legal obligations around inclusion for LGBTQ+ students and staff and to answer any questions this board might have.

Recently, our team at Equality Ohio has experienced an alarming increase in calls from parents, educators, and school counselors observing harassment and mistreatment of LGBTQ+ students in our schools. No doubt, the hostility towards LGBTQ+ youth has been exasperated as a result of politicians and special interest groups leveraging their power to alienate kids from their peers. That's why we were so heartened to hear that Hilliard City School District was allowing teachers to wear a small badge to illustrate their support for all of their students. By simply indicating I'm here, teachers express a willingness to provide students with a safe learning environment, which is crucial for children's successful learning and growth.

I'm an attorney by training. And while I am not giving legal advice, I encourage this district to consult with their counsel. I think it's important to note that title IX includes protections for LGBTQ+ students and individuals that interact with schools. We applaud the Hilliard schools for protecting the free speech of teachers and embracing a welcoming learning environment for all Hilliard students. We're eager to be a supportive partner in helping with educational efforts for training and resources that can be helpful for the school district. Thank you.

Tiffany Rumbalski

Thanks so much for letting me talk today. My name is Tiffany Rumbalski. My oldest graduated in 2020, the worst year to graduate, but she graduated in 2020 from Darby and is now pursuing a musical theater degree at Bowling Green University. She's doing great. One of the best things about her experience at Hilliard City Schools was their art, music, and theater programs. So shout out to all of you arts, music, and theater teachers.

High school is not an easy time for any student. I mean, it is rough. But, it does get better. It really, really does. But the music, art, theater, and understanding teachers were a lifeline for my child, who suffers from mental illness. She is part of the LGBTQ community, and it was because of teachers and just beautiful people who were dedicated that she is thriving today. Seriously, seriously. And I know that's true for so many students.

I have a lot of things to say, but I also have a lot of feelings because I am disgusted that there was a mention of any of our teachers sexualizing students because they wear a sign that says I'm here. That is politically motivated disinformation. It's used, so parents fight with teachers, and teachers fight with school boards, and it's wrong. And it is disgusting to say that, yes, there really is sexual abuse. There really is sexual abuse out there. But to equate the two is disgusting because those very teachers saved my daughter's life.

I'm not sure except to say, if someone took this garbage coming from politicians is here to divide us, let's start showing up for each other. That's my real message.

Carmen Rings

Good evening. My name is Carmen Rings. I came here this evening to find out a little more about the safe teacher program. I'm beginning to learn a little bit about what it's for and why. So my questions are how do you determine what teachers the students should go to, and what are the criteria for having the program in our schools? Thank you.

Joshua Weir

Hello, my primary question is around what is on the badge because if it simply says I'm here and it's a place for children to come and be able to process things, I have no issue with it. But there's a QR code on the back of which I'm still figuring out the website that was shown to me, called queering sex ed teenhealthsource.com. So I don't know if you're allowed to answer a question. Is that part of the QR code?

Mrs. Crowley asked: do you know how many clicks it took to get to that? Were you just given that website, or did you go to the QR code and click through it yourself? Mr. Weir continued, I went to the QR code and had to click, but I wasn't sure if I was given the correct QR code. The bottom line is this. I have six children. I don't know how many people here have children in the district, but I have from one year old to 19. And for me, it's important to know if my nine-year-old daughter is going to go up to a safe male person and read about this. I won't read some of the stuff. I'm embarrassed to actually share with my mom that's with me. This isn't about anti-gay or anti-Christian. My children come to the school, and I hope they will be taught basic education.

I appreciate the mom that came before me. If there are students that are in a place of confusion sexually, and there are people in their family they can go to. And if there are not, there are designated counselors that are allowed. Right. And that's fine. Well, that's something. A QR code that has sexually explicit...now is ABC six, maybe wrong, sure. But I just know it's talking about things that I won't say here, that I think are inappropriate. In fact, as a parent, if a male student came to my nine-year-old daughter, I would file a suit against that person for showing the content that I was just looking at on my phone. I have teenagers that are struggling not to look at pornographic websites because they think it's not healthy. The pornography industry is destructive to both women and men. So I'm very anti-porn. It's fine if people aren't. If they're okay with it, that's okay. But I don't want my child to be exposed to even a measure of that at school. Now, if there's a club, if there's a club somewhere and they as a parent say, hey child, you can go to that

club, cool. Or some other parent wants to send their child to a club that's talking about whatever sexuality they want to talk about... *(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Mr. Perry asked if teachers had given any direction regarding the QR code. Mr. Stewart replied that the QR code was not designed to be given to children.

Sarah Myers

Hello to Stewart and the board members. My name is Sarah Myers. I have a second grader in Washington. I have spoken with you guys against the religious policy, and you have gotten back with me a number of times. But, at the last school board meeting on the 22nd, during the district commitment plan presentation, the speakers stressed a commitment to every student without exception. And it was very deliberate the way they said it. It was four times, every student without exception. So, it jumped out to you. Passing the release time policy guarantees that that commitment will fail. I know that Lifewise has assured everyone that time for their program can be found during the day during electives or specials. But for my seven-year-old daughter, every part of her day is important. So, her classmates leaving means they either miss something important or what, like the class is put in to study hall? There's a school that did that. But for second grade, that's inappropriate. And then my daughter misses out. There is no other option where both groups come out on the same level. Separate but equal has never worked.

The district has committed to every student without exception, but some of the recruitment practices I heard about in other districts seem to favor the self-segregating group of students. In Whitehall, a young child has come home from school with a Lifewise permission slip multiple times. This family was Jewish and wouldn't take advantage of the program, but the young student didn't quite get it, and they thought they were going to get in trouble. In New Albany, another parent said that Lifewise got ahold of the student directory and sent direct mail to each child. From a public school, this is wildly inappropriate. Nobody should have to put up with that. The district is here to serve the students, not these programs.

And finally, if there's a problem with any kind of program, there is no recourse for the district. There's no way to terminate a partnership. There's no way to oversee which group comes in requesting this type of program. So again, it could be Lifewise or a group affiliated with the Hindu or Jewish traditions. It could be affiliated with the Klan. There's nothing you can do about it. Calling this policy a parent's choice issue is a dangerous, negligent shield. Repercussions of this reflect on the whole district, and the board would be powerless to do anything. Thank you.

Lisa Chaffee

Good evening, Mr. Stewart and board members. I have a question. Where is the accountability in this district? Mr. Stewart, you told us prior to school starting that you instructed the teachers not to ask students their pronouns. Yet within the first three days of school, we had over half a dozen instances of teachers disobeying your orders. And your response was that your message was apparently not clear. So, you clarified with the staff, and yet still, we have evidence of teachers asking students what their pronouns are. So, sir, you lied to us, which I honestly don't believe, or you have a group of teachers who have zero respect for you, superintendent, and they are going to do what they want no matter what you say. If I disregard my employer's instructions, I'll be terminated. You, sir, have a culture of bullying and intimidation problem in this district amongst the adults. So, until that has stopped, the bullying of students will never end.

I have had many teachers reach out to me who are just disgusted about what's happening here in this district on many issues but are so afraid of the union and their henchmen and of losing their jobs that

they're terrified to speak up. All over the country, courts are ruling in favor of K through 12 teachers whose first amendment rights were violated when forced by their school to use a child's preferred pronoun and told to deceive parents of their child's wish to be called by a different pronoun. Most recently, in Kansas, a teacher was awarded \$95,000 after she was disciplined for refusing to use a student's preferred pronoun. Is this what you want in Hilliard? How are we as parents supposed to trust that our rights and values are protected, much less the safety of our children, when teachers – and I'm going to say a few teachers, I do believe that most of the teachers in this district are exceptional teachers – blatantly disregard your instructions, how can we be assured that our kids are going to be safe?

In response to the NEA badges, you said the resources accessed with the QR code were for adults only. I would like to know if every single one of you has looked at this website. And can you tell me why a teacher needs to watch the video entitled sex acts that don't get enough play? I got to that video in three clicks. Not only was there a video, but there were definitions written up, like a recipe card on performing certain sexual acts, which I won't name here because it's honestly too embarrassing.

Teachers do not have the training required to counsel or advise students about their sexual identity or mental issues, nor should they. The job of a teacher is to educate in math, science, etcetera – the academics. Allowing teachers to identify themselves as a safe person is opening the door for a pedophile to take advantage of a student. In 2017...(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)

Jamie Dato

Members of the school board, thank you for your service to our community. My name is Jamie Dato. I'm on the Hillard Lifewise spirit committee, and I attend Northwest Bible church right down the road here in Hilliard. Our church is entirely supportive of release time.

I speak here tonight, representing nearly a thousand of our church members in support of the release time policy. As an educator myself, I know this opportunity to be a positive investment in our students. I know research shows, and I've seen firsthand, the positive effects of religious instruction on students. With the current emphasis on social and emotional learning, a character-focused program like Lifewise is the type of thing our school should be embracing as a complement to our daily work.

I know there's been some discussion on the board on educators and teachers to adapt to this opportunity. My understanding about how other schools make release time work is that accommodations by educators are minimal. Additionally, as an educator, my colleagues are more than willing to be flexible and accommodate for things we know are going to be a positive influence on our students.

You can see here tonight, how much of our community is behind us. As a parent, this is the type of opportunity I would like my children to have. It is clear, the practice of release time is well established by the Supreme court, state law, and examples of many school districts. Of the 16 school districts in Franklin County, we in Hilliard are among only four who do not have a release time policy. That makes it feel like we are being left behind. I believe we aim to be exceptional in Hilliard, and adopting this policy and giving parents the opportunity to invest further in the lives of their children can help us live up to our standards.

Please vote to pass a release time policy tonight so parents can have a choice. Thank you.

Danae Gordin

My name is Danae Gordon. I know I'm not supposed to turn and address (*the crowd*), but I just want to say out loud really quick that I love everybody here. I support everybody here.

We are here because we care about students. Our viewpoints can vary. That may be a little bit different, but hopefully, we can come to common ground and common solutions. I'm a nurse in this community as well as a mother of four. As a nurse, it's my job to advocate for those that cannot advocate for themselves. And as a mother, it is absolutely my duty to advocate for my children, which is why I'm speaking today.

Yesterday, I did speak to a member of the group that is wearing a rainbow today. Not trying to call them out. I'm just saying. I asked her what exactly they were coming to support just to have a conversation. She stated they were backing support of LGBTQ students. I reminded her, and I want to remind everyone here today, and so do we. We support every one of our students. Support is not the issue here. Schools, under the code ORC 3313.6011(c)2, are required to give information as well as obtain consent from every parent on any material regarding sexual education. There is no student group or anybody that should blur those lines. Posting a board in the school hallway with different sexualities posted, romances that you can have, reading material accessible to our children that include explicit sexual content, and the teacher badges with the codes on the back, is what we're here fighting right now.

Not that "I'm here." Thank you for being here for our students; that's your job. And sexuality flags on the door with, again, marked QR codes; we don't have information on what they lead to. And the pronoun assignments are a direct violation and should definitely hold consequences. Just to be clear, the badges can be dropped and lay on the ground. They can be left down. This is not, not accessible to students. Not accessible is in your personal email, which will not happen because teachers are not allowed to access content like that on school computers. And that will have consequences. That's ironic to me. In as few as three clicks, students are finding things that I don't feel comfortable even looking at. I do not understand why you need to send why you cannot send it directly to them. Obviously, not through email. Every teacher should be thought of as a safe person and resource, etcetera; have them. We are not against resources. We are not against support. Children are impressionable, and their innocence is worth defending.

The school is here as a part of our community. The village we raise our children in. They are here to be a partner to support and encourage healthy family relationships. There should never be an option to have secret discussions, secret names behind the door boards under covid, that completely dissolve the trust that parenting to have in their school system. Support all of our students. We trust you to do that with our involvement. Whether you agree at how the culture in the household is or the culture of the parents choose to have, never gives you the right to take over and see the child and direct as you see fit. These are our children. We will raise them as we see fit because they're ours. We know the best...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Amy Haggard

Members of the school board, thank you for your service to our community. My name is Amy Haggard. I'm on the Hilliard Lifewise steering committee, and I'm also on staff at Hillard Church of Christ as Children's Director. I'm also happy to share that I recently began subbing in the district. I'm a Davidson graduate and was raised in Hilliard. I have a son in the district, a fifth grader at Norwich, and a son who graduated from Davidson last year. He's also doing well at Bowling Green State University.

As a mother of two, religious instruction is very important to our family. This program would allow us to invest in our kids and support the values we hold dear. I work with the children of our church. It's true that children have opportunities after school and over the weekend for religious instruction. However, there

are many families who would like to incorporate it into the school day as well. Simply the existence of private religious schools demonstrates the demand for this program. Many families are willing to spend thousands of dollars on top of the taxes they pay to get religious education for their kids. However, there are many families who cannot afford private school. Those same families often have trouble participating in after-school and weekend opportunities due to scheduling challenges.

Our family and our church are prepared to put our time and resources behind making release time a success in Hilliard. In fact, we believe the entire church community will be mobilized to provide critical wraparound support to all Hilliard families through this initiative. My church, Hilliard Church of Christ, is entirely supportive of release time. And I speak here tonight representing several hundred of our church members in support of the release time. Please vote to pass the release time policy this evening. Thank you.

Amanda Erickson

Good evening. My name is Amanda Harrison. My pronouns are she, her, and hers, and I'm the Director of Outreach at Kaleidoscope Youth Center. I've been honored to visit Hilliard City Schools a number of times in recent years, facilitating workshops at individual schools and the administrative office and consulting with the district's leadership team to ensure that Hillard continues to prioritize best practices for supporting LGBTQ students.

I was surprised last week to be looped into the larger conversation about safe space badges. Signaling a safe space is one of the simplest things that an adult can do to let students know that they belong and that they are supported. When there's so much anti-LGBTQ vitriol around us, queer folks have to assume that everyone they meet is a potential risk until proven otherwise. Safe space science or badges can provide that clarity, and the visible presence of just one supportive adult can reduce the risk of suicide by 40%.

There seems to be confusion here about the mirror existence of unsafe teachers, which puzzles me. But when you've experienced relative safety from positions of authority for your entire life., it's easy to assume that everyone else enjoys the same safety. We have data that shows how untrue that assumption can be. Only 64% of queer students in Ohio can identify six or more supportive school staff, which is a pretty small percentage of staff members for schools the size of Hilliard's. Most queer students in Ohio experience victimization in school, including verbal harassment and physical assault based on their gender, sexuality, disability, religion, race, or ethnicity. Most never report the incident to school staff. If they can't identify supportive staff, who are they going to tell? And even if they guess, only 27% of those who reported incidents said that it resulted in effective staff intervention.

Last year, I was invited to provide a workshop series to high school teachers right here in Hilliard, and at least one of those sessions was recorded without my consent. The recording was passed to a local organization which ran an article chock-full of bigotry, misinformation, and misrepresentation of myself, Kaleidoscope Youth Center, and the workshop. That organization is recognized as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. So, I would venture to call the staff member who did that secret recording unsafe.

As a grown adult who came out over a decade ago and chose to pursue a career in this field, I was able to laugh through most of that article. But when I needed support, I found it in my team at KYC. But, I'm 34 years old secure in my own self, and surrounded by a supportive community. What happens when we're talking about a 14-year-old being victimized, perhaps one of the 36% who can't identify a group of

supportive staff members, or one of the 79% of teens who are too afraid to even come out at home because of family members?

So, Hilliard City Schools claims to be ready for tomorrow, but in order to live up to such a standard, we have to trust students when they share their experiences, provide the support they request, and let them know...(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)

Brett Anderson

Hello, my name is Brett Anderson. My wife and I live in Hilliard. We have four grandchildren who attend Hilliard elementary schools. Our family attends Veritas Community Church on Cemetery Road. About three years ago, our church purchased the former Hilliard library and converted it to use for worship ministry. Soon after we moved in, our congregation reached out to our new neighbors at JW Reason Elementary. This led to a wonderful partnership between our church and the school. We asked the principal what needs there were and how we could help serve the students and families at JW Reason. Soon thereafter, we found ourselves loving on the kids, parents, and teachers at this school through volunteering in various contributions to families. We found ways to serve, to get connected with the school, and established helpful and meaningful relationships.

Then about a year ago, the principal at JW Reason contacted our church and asked us to become their community partner. They had the opportunity to apply for a grant from the Ohio Department of Education. It's a grant that fits the special demographics of this school. One of the stipulations of the grant was that they had to find a community partner who would be able to volunteer and help get the grant up and running. The idea excited both the staff at JW Reason as well as worshipers at our church fellowship.

So, the grant was written and awarded to JW Reason in the amount of \$200,000 per year for five years. In total, over a million-dollar grant. Last year was the first year having the grant, and fulfilled the state requirements. Some of those requirements include a minimum of 15 hours per week of enrichment and intervention for students. It also required that measurable goals be set and met. Some of these goals were tied to academic performance, showing favorable trends in fewer behavioral incidents and overall attendance improvement. The school met or exceeded all the goals for the grant last year with the help and partnership of our church.

This is a clear example of how faith-based groups can come alongside schools and see amazingly positive results that might not have otherwise happened. I'm here tonight asking you to approve the release time for religious instruction policy. I'm asking this because I passionately care. I care a lot about my grandchildren. I care a lot about the children in this district and how they're developing and learning to become mature, respectful, responsible, and educated adults. And in my caring for children, I care a great deal for their parents because parents are and should be the most influential people in a child's life. To be blunt, it is not right that any professionals, organizations, or governmental body should believe that they know what is better for a child over the child's parents. The parents are the real customers of the education system...(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)

Mrs. Long stated we are at 30 minutes of public participation. In looking at our policy, we would need to extend our public participation. So, is anyone interested in making a motion to extend public participation? Mrs. Crowley motioned to extend public participation to hear from everyone who submitted a form. Mr. Perry seconded the motion. The motion passed 5-0.

Valen Osmundson

My name is Valen Osmundson. I'm an eighth grader at Heritage, and I'm a part of the LGBTQ community. My pronouns are he/him. Teachers should be allowed to easily identify themselves as a safe person using badges for students to come and talk to for anything specifically LGBTQ issues. We spend more time with teachers throughout the year than we do with counselors and even family members. I've been lucky to have supportive family members, but some students aren't as lucky. And even some of my friends aren't. When you talk to your teachers, it should always feel like a safe space. And knowing that specific teachers are safe and supportive of the LGBTQ community has been helpful for me as well. My teachers have been willing to listen to my challenges as an LGBTQ student who struggles with mental health. Being able to talk to my teachers about who I am was able to help me feel comfortable with the labels I used before I came out to my parents. They helped me to feel safe and comfortable in myself, and having supportive and safe teachers saved my life. Every LGBTQ student should be allowed and feel welcome to share the same experience. And there's no way that teachers wearing a simple badge is sexualizing students. Thank you for your time.

Kemmily Kwok

Good evening. My name is Kemmily. I'm the mother of a fifth grader and a ninth grader in this district. I'd like to talk about my opposition to the Lifewise program that you will be voting on tonight. I'm proud to have my kids in the district where diversity, equity, and inclusion, also known as DEI, are being valued. And I quote from the school district's DEI website. Ultimately Hilliard City Schools' goal is to ensure that every student, without exception, is ready for tomorrow. But the time-released Lifewise program logistically is hard to manage, risky, and not safe for our students to be transported to and from by transportation that by agreement should be provided by Lifewise. Once these kids leave our building for Lifewise, whose responsibility will it be after they leave?

Also, a big reason I'm against Lifewise is the disruption to all students in the classes. I think this will be done during school hours. The students who opt into Lifewise would be missing important school class lessons. This could mean that they would need to do makeup lessons, which would mean more work for teachers. Another reason and a big reason is if we bring a program like this, then to be fair and equitable, we would need to allow all faiths of all religions to have similar type programs. Is the district prepared for all that?

While release time is legal, it does not accommodate other religions. I reject this on the principle of religious freedom and that in this country that this is supposed to stand for. Public schools, especially, should not be a place of religious instruction. Just because it's legal doesn't make it right. There has been plenty of ideas in the past that were once legal, such as segregation and not allowing women to own property, but those ideas are no longer legal or allowed. So, I believe that any religious instruction should be left to the parents outside of the school day. The classes only teach one religious sect, Christianity, and we cannot expect Hilliard City Schools to embrace DEI and be ready for tomorrow if we only allow one religion to have instructions during school hours.

If we did allow Lifewise, then you must be prepared to allow Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, and many other religions to be able to carve out public school hours to do this. What will this mean? Does Hilliard City Schools have the resources to allow for all religious groups for release time instruction? Do you actually have the manpower and resources to manage this should we allow Lifewise to be in our schools? Please think about this from an operational standpoint, as well as within the realm of protecting our students and implementing an inclusive public education for all. Thank you.

Jaron Terry of PLAG

Hi, I'm Jaron Terry. My pronouns are she, her, and hers. I'm addressing you tonight as president of the board for PFLAG Columbus. PFLAG is a national organization that was founded in 1973 by one mother through the love for her gay son. The PFLAG chapter provides education, advocacy, and support for parents, family, and friends of LGBTQ persons throughout central Ohio.

PFLAG recognizes that every person has a sexual orientation. It's an innate sense of attraction toward another person. We all have an orientation. We don't choose our orientation, and it cannot be changed. We are each born the way we are. Period. Similarly, we don't choose our gender identity. Therefore, to treat people differently on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, especially children and youth, is harmful.

Regarding safety in schools, PFLAG supports the protection of LGBTQ students from bullying, including cyberbullying, harassment, and discrimination. In the absence of laws providing such protection, PFLAG strongly advises public and private school administrators to implement comprehensive, inclusive policies and practices to end bullying, harassment, and discrimination and create a healthy, safe, and welcoming learning environment for all students. PFLAG's publication, free@pflag.org, outlines 10 ways to make school safer for all. You can read them for yourself. One that I want to share is number six, which is to be public. So, adults should always go public with their support for diversity inclusion and their opposition to bullying and harassment. Signs, safe space anti-bullying stickers and posters, and something as simple as a rainbow sticker go a long way to letting students know where they can find that safe space.

Why is this important? Because students who feel there are supportive teachers and school personnel to turn to report more positive and better learning environments. Do what you can please to let students know that their safety is more than just policy for you by being visible and vocal. Thank you.

Jennifer Young

Good evening President Long, Vice President Perry, and board members Crowley, Vorst, and Murdoch. My name is Jenny Young, and I come this evening to ask you to vote yes on the religious instruction release time policy that is up for consideration this evening.

I come as an invested member of the Hilliard community, but more importantly, as a parent of two Hilliard City School students. In recent years, this board, Hilliard City School administrators, and other involved citizens have put a great deal of time and effort into a three-year strategic action plan that is comprehensive and focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Goal three of the DEI action plan is to, and I quote, foster an inclusive environment for all students. As a board, you have made decisions such as district-wide observances of identity characteristics, including individual choice of pronouns, preferred names, and the district-wide observance of Eid, which is a Muslim holiday that about 20% of our students celebrate. I believe that these decisions were made as efforts toward meeting goal three of the DEI action plan. As a parent and community member, I recognize the intent behind such decisions is to allow students, families, and staff members within the district to feel valued and have a place that respects their differences, recognizing each individual as just that. An individual with unique values, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences, all of which impact how they show up at the school.

As a parent, I know that my children are being taught to respect all people, even when, what is being taught, differs from the values, beliefs, and experiences of who we are as a family. In fact, I appreciate that the board and administration understand that preparing our students for being ready for tomorrow

means to teach them to recognize, interact with, and respect individuals with diverse and valuable backgrounds. I appreciate that my children will leave Hillard City Schools with the knowledge of how to engage with people who do not look like, sound like, believe the same, or celebrate exactly like my children. And indeed, this knowledge will prepare them to be ready for their tomorrows.

A yes vote on the adoption of the religious instruction release time policy will allow our students continued opportunities to learn the backgrounds, beliefs, and practices of additional groups that, to date, have not been given consideration in the current curriculum. But, the inclusive environment that this board seeks to develop should be given the same consideration. As you have heard and are aware, the religious instruction release time policy is legally available to our students and families to opt into. The religious instruction release time policy, and subsequently the knowledge taught during the release elective...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Rev. Jan Avende

Hello, members of the board. I am Reverend Janet Avende. I am a parent to two elementary school kids in the district. I am local clergy, and I am a board-level leader in an international church. I would like to know will all religious groups be welcome to pull their students out. And if so, I don't believe this effort has been made in good faith to welcome all religious groups to pull their students. The minutes from August 22nd state that Mr. Vorst says, you said we could be gatekeepers for which religions can participate. And it goes on to say that there are 39 churches and one mosque in our community.

I am a leader in this community of a religious group. We were not consulted. We were not even recognized in those previous minutes. How are you going to reach out to all of the wide variety of communities that have religious affiliations in Hilliard? How will students and parents be notified of what groups are available for them to allow their students to attend? Being a local Pagan priest, as well as the Vice Archdruid of an international church, I would like to know how I can pull out students for my group to be able to attend religious ed through their school.

If this policy passes, we have a religious education program ready to go. It focuses on virtues, right action, the proper ways to make a sacrifice, and how to worship the multitude and many gods that exist in this world. So, I would like to know why we weren't considered in the previous minutes and going forward. And my answer there is that I don't think the district knows how to do that. They don't know the religious communities that are minorities in this community. They cannot possibly seek all of us out. And therefore, I ask that the board vote no on this policy because you cannot reach out to us. We are educating our own children in the ways that we find are best for their spiritual development. And that's not what the board needs to do. That is not what the district needs to do. There is time for that after school and on weekends. It is about the delineation of priorities. And so, if you cannot consider all religions to be welcome, including those that you don't even know the names of, cause I've heard it mentioned many times the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Jewish, the Muslims, and the Christians. Hello. Please include me too. And if you can't, you need to vote no. Thank you for your time.

Linna Jordan

My name's Linna Jordan, and I am here as president of the Hillard Education Association. Ten days ago, I emailed you sharing my concerns about the religious release language. I included a citation from Ohio Revised Code, which defined fine arts as core meaning art and music programs cannot be touched for this release.

I included links to state standards and assessing expectations for physical education. So missing PE would also have a negative impact. I explained some of the intricacies of building a master schedule from almost two decades of experience, which our newest board members don't have. I reminded you about the need to negotiate change conditions with HEA and OAPSE before anything can be implemented. I hoped to get a response showing that you thought some of these points out or would add them to future discussions with the superintendent, other admin, or staff and that you were aware of existing ORC guidelines and state standards.

What I didn't expect was that my email would be forwarded to Lifewise without my permission. If I had wanted to email Lifewise, I would have written to them myself. Since they have no role in writing ORC, don't build our master schedules, aren't part of union negotiations, and aren't part of the board, my intended audience, I didn't feel the need to contact them. They wouldn't have comments relevant to the points I sent you. If I thought anyone outside HCSD had these answers, I would've reached out to various leaders in the community and not one specific group. Unless, of course, you, as the board, are telling me that we are only working with Lifewise and no one else.

It is disappointing that we continue to act as if this is so when it shouldn't be. I hope that this isn't true because according to your own policy, BBF, no board member should place the interest of one group above the interest of the entire district. Unfortunately, that's what it looks like to many of us, and we all know that impressions matter. And that intent and impact aren't always the same. This brings me to another piece of existing language. Policy IGA states that a high priority must be given to the kinds of learning which serve as a foundation for other educational development. These include English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, music, art, health, physical education, and technology.

Yet again, the impression given to the community is that this policy the board is considering will impact music, health, PE, and technology. You say educating the whole child is important, but then you give credence to proposals that counter to existing policy. This may not be your intent, but that's what some impacted teachers and community members are gleaning from this proposal. It seems like you're not looking objectively at the reality of what it needs to implement...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Ani Craddolph

Hello, my name is, as you said, Ani Craddolph, and I come to you as an LGBTQ+ student. As a minority student who is scared, I walk into the classroom every day, and I don't know whether or not my peers support me or whether or not the teacher supports me unless I explicitly see their badge on the wall or on their hand or wherever it may be, which no, I have never seen the QR code nor did I know it existed until this meeting. So, there's that. That's just an example, but I am like most students who don't get close enough to the badge or to a teacher with the badge to see that it has a backside. I just wanted to say that I want you to vote no on the release for religious instruction. I believe at the end of the day, it comes down to the simple phrase that got our nation to where it is to this day, separation of church and state. And this would directly go against that which the founding fathers built this country for. That is one of the founding principles that we have for this country. So, that's all I have to say. Thank you.

Amy Chamberlain

Good evening. My name is Dr. Amy Chamberlain, and I am a graduate of Hilliard. I am a parent of teenagers in the Hilliard School District. In fact, I moved away for 20 years and came back specifically for my children to go to school here because of the quality of education that the Hilliard City School District provides. I am proud of the diversity that my children get to experience every day in their schools.

I first would like to express my great concern for students being removed from classrooms in order to get religious education. It just feels like a real slippery slope here on the separation of church and state. But more importantly, I feel like those specials and extras teachers are critical to a well-rounded education. So, in addition to being a Hilliard parent, I am a psychologist. I am also an ordained lay minister in the Christian faith. I am also an adjunct professor who teaches here in Hilliard for Columbus State. I can think of so many religious and educational reasons why our children need these extras classes. They need the specials classes.

I have personal experiences and training on why those well-rounded skills are essential. I grew up with a parent who was a minister. My dad and both of my grandfathers were ministers. I went to church two to three times a week when I was a student. The most important things in my life were my church youth group and my Hilliard theater troop. And I think that we shouldn't be limiting those accesses and resources and groups of support and education for our students by bringing religious education into the school day. I'm all for it outside of school.

Here's the other thing I want to say. When it comes to the teacher badges, I really appreciate the idea that most of the students didn't know there was a back to them. And I think that that's very true. I don't want the message to be confused. These are not QR codes designed for students to be looking at in the first place. As a trained therapist, as an educator, and as a parent, I want to know that the teachers have access to an appropriate website giving them appropriate information about the LGBTQ community.

What I can say is that as a mother of a trans child...(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)

Laney Osborne

Hi, my name is Laney Osborne, and I am gender fluid, meaning I use she/her, he/him, and they/them pronouns. And yeah, that is the thing. I am a senior at Hilliard Darby High School, and I'm a student leader of my GSA. These past few weeks have been tough as a teenager who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community. I'm sitting here watching people who were once friends fighting over something as silly as another's gender identity or sexual orientation. This badge right here is what we're fighting over? This badge that says I'm here is what we're fighting.

Yesterday, I went to church and my pastor, who was in attendance here just now, said that people are no longer opponents; they are enemies. And honestly, I think that statement, unfortunately, fits the type of community we are in right now. It's not everybody, though. It's certain people, but it's enough people to make it a problem. There are enough people bashing the LGBTQ+ community that it makes us feel like we are unsafe.

Those badges that teachers wear make us feel safe. They make us feel included. They make us feel like we aren't alone in this battle that we face every single day when we wake up. Some say, oh, I'm here about this. These are so not needed. They should know every teacher is safe. Well, get this. Not every teacher is safe. Not every person is going to be safe. Do you expect us to think we can go to a teacher who has previously voiced their opinion on this topic? Do you think I'm going to go to a teacher I don't know and spill all of my secrets about who I am and why I am the way I am? You know, I'm not going to go to a teacher that I don't know or that doesn't have an I'm here badge displayed somewhere. Just let these teachers wear a badge that shows my fellow peers that we aren't alone. Stop bashing teachers for wearing something that indicates their students are safe. Yeah, teachers are here to teach, but they're also here to protect their kids. They came into this education system to have a protection system as well.

You know, whether you're gay, straight, trans, bi-, white, black, purple, or even green, you are loved. We are all loved. And we, as kids in the worst time ever to be a kid, deserve to know that teachers are here for us. And we deserve to know that when a teacher wears this badge right here, we can go to them for anything. And no, it's not pedophilia. I don't know who said that, but it's idiotic. Thanks.

Ruth Miller

So, thank you guys so much for keeping comments open. I really appreciate the time that you're giving us this evening. I had a wonderful opportunity to meet the superintendent at the Hilliard Historical Society annual dinner. And this is just a brief thing on the badges and LGBTQ sport.

One thing I've learned giving tours at the Hilliard Historical Society is Hilliard has a really long history of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We were one of the first schools to be fully integrated. When you look at the graduating class of 1913, there are so many female faces in there in a time where not too long before that, women didn't even get educated above third grade. So, thank you, guys, for being inclusive. Thank you for caring for and loving my children. I have two children in the school district, both of them in the LGBTQ community. I absolutely love them and adore them. And they love all their teachers and have been incredibly supportive and incredibly supported. And that has given them an opportunity to flourish.

They've also been able to participate in a lot of different music and art and PE environments in their elementary school coming up into sixth and seventh grade now, and I have a seventh grader in the Shrek play. I couldn't be more thrilled, and I'm so glad that that play is happening. So, thank you for that as well. But, had they not had those classes at those integral points in their education, they would not be as interested in school. They would not be in the band. They would not be in the orchestra. They would not be into acting and drawing. And my oldest will draw you an amazing picture that you will think literally she just heard it and colored it. No, they drew it. But anyway, my point is this, please vote no on the religious release time policy.

The disruption in the school district is not going to be worth it. The juice is not worth the squeeze here. I gotta tell you. The disruption is going to be bad. The kids who are coming and going, how are you going to properly direct a kindergartner from their classroom to the office? How are you going to make sure that the correct kindergartner is going? How are you not going to use district resources that are already stressed out?

We ask our teachers to do so much, and they do it willingly because they love our kids. They don't do it because they have a political agenda. They could give a crap less about politics. They love our kids, and that's why they're here. And that's why they get don't get paid that much...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Kathy Grenzalis

Thank you so much. And I appreciate all of you being here as well for the opportunity to share my opinion. It has come to my attention that Hilliard Schools has adopted an agenda which offers teachers an opportunity to be trained to counsel, advise, or otherwise offer input to children who have questions about their sexual identity. This counsel is being offered outside the purview and, at times, knowledge of their parents. These trained individuals wear badges saying, I'm here. I've seen these badges, I've scanned the QR code, and I've examined the material given to these teachers to advise our children.

My first concern is that the word "here" is a not very well obscured code for you can talk to me about things you don't want your parents to know. By promoting this, you are telling the student that parents

cannot be trusted and should be excluded from certain topics or conversations. By allowing a badge to be the sign of a safe party, all other parties, including teacher support personnel, parents, priests, rabbis, pastors, and caring adults in their lives not wearing a badge are deemed unsafe. Is this a message you want to send? Our children face a wide range of mental health challenges. Why do we not have badges on all these other non-academic mental health topics? I suggest because the NEA is not pushing, requiring, or otherwise promoting these agendas as they are the LGBTQ agenda.

I received an email today in response to my concerns from Mr. Stewart. His answer to my objections to these badges was both naive and contradictory. The QR code, he says, exposes links to graphics and age-inappropriate content so that teachers are instructed to put tape over it. If a QR code is age-inappropriate and requires duct tape, why is it in our schools?

Let me suggest one badge that I would like to see all teachers wear. Right here, it says I teach. If you have a question...*(inaudible due to crowd noise)*... On this badge will be a QR code that directs the wearer to the admissions directory, including the name and contact information of a parent or caring guardian of each child. Should a question arise outside of academics, a parent is immediately contacted and included in the discussion.

I will be watching closely should this unnecessary distraction from teaching continue at our schools. The NEA is pushing an agenda. I will be pushing no in the voting booth on tax levies to fund Hilliard Schools. Thank you.

Aaron Rumpf

Board members, thank you for hearing my opinion this evening, but first and more so, thank you for your service. I started coming into meetings beginning this most recent June. I think we're about 20 people at that session. And in the ensuing months, I've seen the weight and volume of your role. So, I sincerely thank you for all that you do.

My name is Aaron Rumpf, and my wife is Allison. We've been residents of Hilliard since June 2013. And at the end of last school year, I decided I'd like to get more involved in my community as we're upon this home long-term. As I'll mention in another moment, consequently, I began attending school board and city board meetings with Jack, my fourth grader at Darby Creek, and Layla, my first grader at Alton Darby. They're developing friendships, and this is where we want to be.

It is my opinion that release time for religious instruction is an exceptional value added to this city of Hilliard and, more specifically, the Hilliard City School District. And you guys can begin taking advantage of it. It has already been pointed out to this audience the legality of such an adoptive policy. We know that but let's consider another important angle, one perhaps to me and my household. This is a way to further differentiate our neighborhoods and district. Let me cite some personal examples quickly. I was proud to hear of Hilliard city school's partnership with OSU to pilot a tracing method regarding the pandemic virus and the school's commitment to getting the kids in the classroom faster. And it worked, getting back in the classroom way sooner than we would've been in multiple other local school districts. So, thank you.

And I'm further indebted to this district as last year, a reading deficiency was identified within my son, and he was guided into a plan to enhance his abilities. And after just one year of extra assistance, the deficiency has been removed, and he's reading at grade level. Protocols and staffing helped my own household again, thank you. My point is I already live in Hilliard City Schools. I'm happy to add now that my wife and I are closing on a new home right here in Hilliard. Our kids won't even have to switch their

specific schools. This was by design, and we're so pleased it's all panning out. But, how can I approach my friends, my colleagues, and my growing network, vocationally and even family from Toledo considering relocating to central Ohio, tell them to choose Hilliard over Dublin or new Albany as forward-thinking and more robust in its offering to the students? And now, we would consider voting down this policy for religious instruction. Communities that have released time for religious instruction, such as Lifewise programs, are seeing the positive impact of additional character education in their schools' homes. I really desire this option for Jack and Layla.

As I see it, this an opportunity to make our homes and this community a better place to live. It's our home. I'm proud of Hilliard and our schools so much that we're signing a 30-year note. So, this is our home. Ten years in the rears, and Lord willing, decades to come. So, thank you for your open dialogue with parents like myself. And in the further advancement of Hilliard City Schools exceptionality, which we have here, thank you for your yes vote tonight.

Brittany Alexander

Good evening. My name is Brittany Alexander. I'm an educator and resident of the district, and I proudly serve as the HEA vice president. Like my colleagues here tonight, I feel compelled to come to speak to you.

While I did not begin my career in Hillard schools, I have found my place here. It's a place that stands above other districts where I have taught. It's a place of acceptance and love, with passion and grace for all—one where mutual respect for one another is the norm. Here, we sit down together to discuss our concerns and agreements and work to find common ground. Here, we're all on the same team. It's called team student. This is what makes me love this district and want to stay here, and what I've known to be the Hilliard way.

More recently, my special place, my second home, is becoming unrecognizable to me. More and more frequently, I see misinformation and distrust eating away at our team spirit. Too often, I'm seeing colleagues attacked and vilified publicly but not personally engaged by those accusing them. These actions ripple into further discord and fear and do nothing to help team student. I feel compelled to share this with you here tonight because I believe the comments, some we've heard here tonight, in reference to our wearing the I'm here badges, have crossed a line into defamation, and I cannot let that stand. Suggesting nefarious intentions is vial. Hilliard educators are dedicated, caring professionals who support our students, our families, and our community however we can. Team student thrives when we work together despite and because of our differences. I hope that we can find our way back to working together as a team. I believe that Hilliard is still the place that I came to love, but right now, my faith that it will remain that way is shaky. Collectively, we will decide where we go from here. My colleagues and I remain committed to team student. And I want to thank all the OAPSE and HEA members who came and gave their night and time to be here in support of all of us. Thank you.

Justin Kershaw

Before I say my statement, I'd like to thank you, the school board, for supporting our community and serving our kids. My name is Justin Kershaw, and out of courtesy for some of my new neighbors I met, my pronoun is he/him. But more importantly, I identify as a Christian follower of Jesus.

I've lived in Hilliard for nearly 10 years, and I am soon to be the father of five – one who attends Heritage and one who attends Hoffman Trails. Also, my wife is a graduate of Darby, and we are grateful for this community. I'm on the board of Lifewise Academy. I'm here to vouch for Lifewise leadership, specifically its founder, Joel Penton. I feel the need to speak up for the leadership of Lifewise because it was brought

to my attention that some individuals in the community questioned the financial responsibility of Lifewise Academy and Joel Penton's character. I first became aware of Joel Penton when I was attending Michigan State University, where I played football. Joel played the same position as me at Ohio State. I was clearly a better athlete player than Joel. While at Michigan State, I would often hear of Joel's positive impact on the community while sharing his faith with his students. So, I was excited when I was able to connect with Joel years later when I heard his family had settled in Hilliard.

During my first interaction with Joel, he explained to me the release time law and invited me to the first-ever Lifewise banquet fundraiser. After the banquet, he asked me to assess the fundraiser. I told him that the fundraiser and banquet were excellent. The only issue that I saw was my wife and I were the darkest complected people in the room, with the exception of the staff serving the tables. Simply put, I thought the event and the movement lacked diversity. Joel agreed with my assessment.

Since then, I've seen Joel strategically and intentionally seek after well-qualified candidates that happened to be African-American to work for Lifewise. I've also seen Joel strategically and intentionally build relationships and socio-economically and richly diverse communities like Whitehall and Columbus Public Schools so that the ministry can impact children.

A few months later, Joel asked me if I would be on the board of directors for Lifewise, and I agreed. During the first meeting as a board member, I was shocked by two things. The first thing was the amount of money that Lifewise annually raises for their donors. The second piece of information that shocked me was Joel Penton's salary. Seeing how much he made, coupled with the fact that he has five children, shocked me. I wondered how someone was able to raise a family of seven on such a moderate salary. Since that day, I observed that Joel drives a youth minivan, has one suit, and lives in a modest home in Hilliard. Joel's goal isn't popularity or financial gain. Joel's aim is to have a positive impact on children. And I think that's all of our goals. Joel's a good leader and a friend of mine. And I don't see eye to eye with him on every issue, but our common bond is our faith in Christ and the impact on children, which we all share. Parents in our community deserve to have the option to have children attend Lifewise Academy, just as the parents in Whitehall, Dublin, and Upper Arlington. I can assure you from a person inside the ministry that the leadership has a right for...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Nyah Kershaw

Hi, my name is Nyah Kershaw, and I'm a seventh grader at Hilliard Heritage Middle School. I'm grateful to the school board for listening to the request of the families they are serving. One of my favorite experiences in the Hilliard School District is the opportunity to be in specials like gym, art, and music. I'm currently playing the tuba in the Heritage band. I would love the option to have Lifewise Academy in my special routine. It would allow me to become closer to my faith and build character and bring peace to our schools, which is something that the district could use. Thank you.

Marcus Merillat

Hi, my name is Marcus Merillat, and my pronouns are he/him. I attend Hillard Darby High School. I'm here in support of the safe person's badges. The reason I'm here is because me and many of my friends are part of the LGBTQ community and use resources like the GSA in talking to teachers about issues. Another reason I support the LGBTQ badges is because visibility matters. First, I've never seen the QR code at all. Second, I disagree with the release time religious instruction because if you want your kid or kids to learn about whatever God you worship, take them to church. That's all it is. Thank you.

Emily Cole

Good evening, everyone. I'm Emily Cole. I use she/her pronouns and I'm a very proud mother of a kindergartner at Avery elementary school and a future kindergartner in just a couple of years. Honestly, I'm appalled that I'm even here tonight missing my kids' bedtime to speak to you, discussing a vote to deprioritize whole child education, to allow for outside religious instruction to disrupt the right of my child to learn in the classroom. I am even further appalled that we are commenting on a piece of legislation some have called semantics when semantics are literally what law is. You are voting on something you haven't even all read. It's appalling, and you should be embarrassed. You ran for this seat. You are school board members. Your job in this role is to prioritize the educational wellness of all public-school students in this great district, period. Your job is not to be the political front persons for two Hilliard City Council members with aspirations far beyond Hilliard and an unhinged community member with delusions of grandeur.

As one gentleman asked us in the very beginning to do, I did look around. Do you know what I see? I see so many of these red t-shirts tonight saying Lifewise. They're not saying, students. That's promoting a Bible-based learning academy. You are here for our schools, our learning, our students, period. Do you even know how this will disrupt the school day? Has it been in practice anywhere else? Do you understand what the headline would read when legitimate safety concerns associated with allowing in and out, in and out access to the building or children walking across the street with Lifewise folks? Are they certified the same way teachers are? Are they held to the same standard? The headline will read Hilliard City School students "X." Do you know part of my child's kindergarten orientation was talking about which desk he will hide under when there's an active shooter? Think about that; that is the level of scrutiny our teachers are under. And you honestly think that we should just allow anyone into the building if they say they're for a religion. No. Have you thought at all about what will happen to the students who do leave school during the day, who don't have any artwork on school walls because they never actually attend art? Have you thought about what will happen to the students who are left out of school performances, musicals, and plays? (*buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit*)

Sherise Thompson

Hi, my name is Sherise, and I'm the secretary for HEA. I decided to come before you and talk about our educators. At the last board meeting, we sat through a hiring presentation by Mr. Hennes and Mr. Walker. It is not easy to become a staff member here in Hilliard. It is a rigorous process, and as you heard, we hire some amazing people. We did not sign up for a constant battle between us and the community. We have no voice right now. We understand that not all of our lessons and conversations look at everyone in the warm and fuzzies, but there is a reason we do what we do.

We hear stick to the basics – reading, writing, and arithmetic. The three Rs. Teaching goes way beyond that. Studies show that it's not enough for our kids to succeed in today's world. One thing that falls outside of the three Rs is pronoun usage. None of us were ever contacted about the complaints in regards to the first day activities and asking pronouns. That was a crucial step, don't you think? We have become the attacked and the voiceless. The perception is that a group or parent gets mad about a subject, and they go to the board, the board goes to Mr. Stewart, and then we're shut down. Don't you think that the missing link here is communication between us, the educators, and the parents? We are not being contacted or communicated with about anything when it comes to these students. Don't you think we should be part of this conversation? Why are we being taken out of the step? Also, there is a board policy on that very step – section K under public complaints, code KL. The group or parent may not always like what we have to say, and that's fine, but we should still get a voice. We should still be that first step in the line of communication.

Back to pronouns. The sheet I gave them to fill out has pieces of information I just wanted to know. Did they have to fill the whole thing out? Nope. Did no one else have to see it? No. Did they even talk about it in class? No, again. My why? Our LGBTQ kids exist even as we start to strip their identities from them and pretend their existence is too sexual for our hallways. People are calling for no pronouns, no flags, no GSA, no bulletin boards, but those kids are still walking our halls and no longer represented. But you know what makes them feel safe, seen, and respected? Using their proper pronouns and those examples that I just listed above, but educators no longer feel safe to do that for them anymore.

We are not just teaching the Rs, and it's disrespectful to continue to say that's all we should be doing. Educating is an art. That's why we had to go to school and get a degree. Some of us even have masters and beyond. Also, as a close, today, in an ever-diversifying world, a classroom is a place where students are often first exposed to people who hail from a range of different backgrounds, hold different beliefs, and have...(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)

Jon Osmundson

Good evening, board members. My name's Jon Osmundson, and I've met all of you. I've spoken to each of you at least once individually, and I thank you for the chance to be here today. I also identify as he/him pronouns. First, just want to say before I start, that I'm sitting back here today, and I'm just kind of appalled at the changing of this policy at the last minute. Dude, that's like a last-minute parlor trick. We've had conversations, and this has been like an ongoing thing. I don't know where that came from. You had a change of heart, cool. But we've had conversations, and you gave me your phone number. Dude, like reach out and let me know. Right? I've been at this since the very first day that this could be spoken on at school board meeting when I was the only one speaking.

So, I again speak of opposition, not only the philosophy but as a clergy member in this community, as a pastor at the Hilliard United Methodist Church, and as a religious educator. I'm in support of religious education, but not at the expense of students here in the public school academic day. There's no possible way to ensure that supporting agencies that say otherwise that passing this policy will not disrupt academic instructions for those who do not leave the building. Even those who do, there will be loss of instructional time as students go to and from classrooms to the front board. How they get there is a whole entirely different issue. Yet this policy is being championed at a time when we've heard from teachers, administrators, parents in the community that since March of 2019, our students have faced struggles with loss of instruction time. And our district has worked so hard to catch up and to keep kids in the traditional classroom.

At the August 22nd board of education meeting, we heard the commitment plan to achieve and maintain excellence across every building in this district; within the school buildings of the district. You each offered praise and thanks, and you said this was amazing work. You commented on how they had done such a great job. There were smiles and nods around the table, and board members commented on how much goes in the academic day. One of the presenters mentioned the days were short, not getting any longer. If the days are short, not getting longer, and students can be excused en masse, not just one going into the doctor's appointment, how does a policy such as this not affect instructional time? No one has provided an answer on that other than, well, they just tell us it doesn't disrupt. Well, of course, they tell you that because they have a vested interest in passing a policy. If they're honest, they might just say, they're willing to do their best to cause the least amount of disruption or minimize disruption.

What about the kids who don't leave HCSD? What instructional time are they going to lose? Can we maintain our commitment to equitable and inclusive education for those who remain behind and even for those who leave? Does the instruction stop? Does the instruction change? The answer I got is let's pass the policy, and we'll see. Friends, that's bad policy. If you're going to vote on a policy...*(inaudible due to crowd noise)*...I hope you know the answer. And most of it's not every one of these objections and not just quote answers from the outside organization. You know, I appreciate the gentleman who shared the relationship their church has had with their community and the success they had outside school hours. Why don't we work with other faith communities to do the same? I've asked the school board that, and I don't know why we don't get that answer. I asked parents and religious leaders of this community and board of education to come together to find alternative before and after school options, evening options, weekend options. As a parent, I made a choice to enroll my children at HCSD, not a private school. My wife and I chose which non-school activities our kids participate in...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Terry Castor, M.D.

Good evening; it's been a long evening. I come here as the grandparent of five kids, and I also come as a doctor. I had a 46-year career in internal medicine in Worthington, Ohio. Over that time, I had exposure to a wide variety of people and extreme diversity. I value diversity. I cared for and loved my patients, all of them, the best I could.

And you know, we've heard a lot of that emotion, a lot of opinions, and a lot about diversity, inclusion, and equality, but I've heard only a hint of unity, but not too much. We need to bring it back to kind of basic. I'm going to talk about things from a medical standpoint. We're talking education here. Education, to me, is based on facts and not on opinion or how loud you talk. Just because you say something and believe it doesn't mean it's a fact. So, I think we look at this from a medical fact standpoint. I've got this more Lifewise, but I'm also talking about sexual education and sexual environment thing. And that is the facts say, basic anatomy, men and women are different. They're different anatomically, and they're different endocrinologically, and those differences are important for procreation, the family unit, and other things that I won't go into.

The other thing that I think we need to keep in mind as we're talking about education at this level is the neurophysiology of brain development. The brain develops from back to front. The last part of the brain to develop is the prefrontal cortex. And that doesn't get fully developed until late adolescence. That center is very important and has many functions. The big three are decision-making, impulse control, and attention. It explains a lot about behaviors in teenagers. So, when we're talking about equality, it has always been equal opportunity in my mind. Diversity has always meant perspective differences. What I don't think this means...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Latricia Barker

Hello, superintendent and board. My preferred name is Trish Barker, but you know, we all have something assigned to us at birth, and then we get to change it sometimes. It's important to some people. I want to talk about the last board meeting and my thoughts and repercussions on that.

At the last board meeting, I watched several staff members talk about the three-year commitment plan that we heard a lot about tonight. And how every staff member, and it was super emphasized that every teacher, every bus driver, everyone had to understand the role they played in educating students. One quote from one of the administrators, which was mentioned a few times tonight, is a lot to do there, and the day didn't get any longer. I listened as the board members commented on how well the plan was

thought out, and President Long said how other districts were looking at this to be a template of success for other districts. And removing kids during the day jeopardizes that success.

Then there was the presentation on the hiring practices. The thoroughness in the background checks that all staff, teachers, and such were vetted using trusted practices. The district will have no visibility into the practices that the groups offering programs followed to vet their staff and volunteers. I also heard that the number of applicants was much lower this year. Is now the right time when we have teacher shortages to send a certain signal to certain teachers that they aren't as valued as others? Will other teachers think it's only a matter of time before they don't care about what I do either?

Since that meeting, I've seen a lot of that discussion on religious release. A lot of folks think that it's one program, it will only be one day a week, but nowhere in either of the made-up policies does it say one day a week. If I want to go to that woman's church, I can go. If I want to go to the Lifewise one, I can go. If I want to go to a Jewish one, I can go; you can't stop me. I can go out five or six times a week. There's no limit. So, if several programs are developed, a student could choose to leave, and their parents can choose to let them after all that, but not all students. Students that are handicapped or have state-provided aid cannot leave because the school cannot put money into those programs. That aid cannot leave the building and assist that student. So immediately out of the gate, this program is discriminatory on its face value, and that all students cannot participate. Will this create...*(inaudible due to crowd noise)*...that taxpayers like me will have to pay for? The policy language itself is flawed. It says that students may not discriminate against...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Sarah Kamento

My name's Sarah, and instead of reiterating what so many before we have highlighted, which is the undeniable need for this district to return to academics and accountability to parents, I'm instead electing to read a passage from a book that is currently available in four of our schools, meaning that four Hilliard educators deemed this to be appropriate content for our children as young as seventh grade.

“Have you ever gotten a blow job? That's out of the blue. I said the blue, like, you know, left field, left field, like in baseball, like out nowhere. I mean, what even made you think of that? I've just never given one. She answered, her little voice dripping with seductiveness. It was so brazen. I thought I would explode. I never thought, I mean, from Alaska hearing that stuff was one thing, but to hear her sweet little Romanian voice go all sexy all of a sudden. No, I said I never have. Do you think it would be fun? Do I? Um, yeah. I mean, but you don't have to. I think I want to, she said, and we kissed a little and then, and then with me sitting, watching the Brady bunch, watching Marsha, Marsha, Marsha, up to her Brady antics, Laura unbuttoned my pants and pulled my boxers down a little and pulled out my penis. Wow, she said. What? She looked up at me but didn't move her face, nanometers away from my penis. It's weird. What do you mean weird? Just big, I guess. I could live with that kind of weird. And then she wrapped her hand around it and put it into her mouth and waited. We were both very still, she did not move a muscle in her body, and I did not move a muscle in mine. I knew at some point something else was supposed to happen, but I wasn't quite sure what. She stayed still, and I could feel her nervous breath for a minute, for as long as it took the Brady's to steal the key and unlock themselves from the ghost town jail. She laid there, stock still with my penis in her mouth, and I sat there and waited. And then she took it out of her mouth and looked at me quizzically. Should I do something? I don't know, I said. Everything I've learned from watching porn had suddenly exited my brain. I thought maybe she should move her head up and down, but wouldn't that choke her? So, I just stayed quiet. Should I like bite? Don't bite. I mean, I don't think, I mean, that felt nice. That was good. I don't know if there's anything else. I mean, you didn't even, maybe you should go ask Alaska. So, we went to her room, and

we asked Alaska, and she laughed and laughed sitting on her bed. She laughed until she cried, and then she walked into the bathroom and returned with a tube of toothpaste and showed us in detail. Never have I so wanted to be Crest Complete.

This chapter then goes on to illustrate this sexual encounter up to and including orgasm. Further, you see all of these post-it notes; each one accounts for an instance of alcohol and drug use, violence, or pornography and sexual encounters described in great detail to our young readers.

Starting in 2016, the Ohio Department of Education added a new grade mark for districts, which is prepared for success. Since the inception in this category, Hillard has not received a grade higher than C, with the last two years being Ds. Is it any wonder that our children are, according to the Ohio Department of Education, not prepared for success when this is the content that's made available to them? So, it begs the question school board and Mr. Stewart, for what is the Hilliard City Schools preparing our children for with this content?

Tryg Veker

Thank you for being patient. Thank you for all of your time. Thank you for being here. First, I just want to tell you that I love you. My name is Tryg. Obviously, I'm wearing a Lifewise t-shirt, but this is just representative of something that I support. But I bleed red; you believe red, we all bleed red in this room. And I just feel like there needs to be like this deflation of emotion, cause there's just so much going on. So, I appreciate you all. I've prayed for you. I was praying for you as this was all going on because you have a lot to deal with. And I just want you to know that I appreciate your work because it's hard, and you guys willingly put yourself in this position to listen to these things, make these hard decisions and care for our kids. And that matters to me. And you matter to me for that reason.

I had other things that I wanted to say, but honestly, I just wanted to tell you how lucky you are because I've heard a lot about diversity, equality, and inclusion. John 3:16 says for God, so loved the world. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would trust him would not perish but have eternal life. And that means that every student, without exception, every school board member, without exception, every single person in every single seat in this room, without exception, is loved by God. And whether you want to believe it or not, he loves you. And he cares for you, and he knows every care on your head. And he gave his son for you. And I don't know about a more inclusive statement than a God that would believe for you and had opened up his arms to you. Even for those that drove the nails through his very arms and feet. I just want you to know that you are loved by me, that you are welcome at my church. I'm a pastor of Movement Church. And I also want you Hilliard School board members to know, obviously, I'm in support of Lifewise and that you are loved by God too. And that more than anything, we are all loved by God. We're all made by God, and we need to come together in unity and support one another and love one another. And just lay aside our contempt. And we will do that when we look at Jesus and the fact that those that have contempt towards him, he died for. And so, thank you. I love you.

Cynthia Sheets

First of all, thanks cause I know you guys got a tough crowd tonight. I wanted to go over just a couple of things. A group of parents met with Mr. Stewart in mid-July to discuss some of our concerns for this coming school year. We addressed a couple different things I want to highlight. We addressed the sexual content in our libraries. Mr. Stewart's response was some parents would approve. We questioned transgender book displays, and they were compared to displays of books for black history month. I'm hardly ever silent, but I didn't know what to say to respond to that. I think sexuality of any type should not

be on display or otherwise in a public school building. At that same meeting, Mr. Stewart, these are his words, he said the liberal staff would be too afraid to cross any line to the students. I believe since that meeting; we have proof indicating the exact opposite. One being the billboard at Memorial with the explicit sexual definitions, the door at Tharp with the pride flag, and the QR codes. Those have been up since last year. So, I have an accountability question. I haven't been able to get answered. So, Mr. Stewart had stated his staff wouldn't cross any lines. Was he aware of this and supported such, or was he unaware of what was happening in our schools? I've yet to get an answer to that question. I feel like every parent in our district deserves that answer.

I've got emails from board members from in the district office stating that the pronoun assignments were not to happen this year. They did, I was then told the communication was not clear, but the communication gap had been addressed. And yet, another teacher provided that assignment. So, and then we hear a teacher here who say she never got that directive not to give those assignments. So again, here's an accountability issue. Did the teachers get the directive? Did they ignore the directive? Was the directive poor? We have a communication problem, and I feel like it needs to be addressed. We need to be transparent. We need to be honest with the parents of the students.

Now we've got the badges that seem to be a big old hot button. I have an email that states that they're not from the district, they're from the NEA and the HEA, and the QR code is not for student use. Although, a student had one on. The QR codes are for professional development. Three clicks and you can find...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Jon Parker-Jones

Good evening. I'm John Parker-Jones, and I'm here to express my opposition to policy JEFB, which would regularly permit absence during the school day. And I have signatures from 650 others who agree with this opposition. As a public educator for the past 29 years for grades five through 12 in the neighboring district, it's been my experience that students thrive when instruction is delivered by high qualified state-credentialed teachers, when expectations and routines are clear and consistent, and when students are fully engaged and present in their learning environment. This policy would disrupt these norms as well as the sense of community every building ascribes to achieve. Disruptions in the educational process should be minimized, not expanded, especially within Hilliard City Schools, which this past spring reported its second lowest high school graduation rate in the past six years and lags behind peer districts in several key statewide metrics, including graduation rate, percentage of students who enter college within two years, graduating college within six years, performance index score, and prepared for success score as reported by the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio legislature. I fully expect these deficiencies will be remedied as a result of the district's recently adopted commitment plan, but those remedies will be slowed if students are permitted to exercise absence during the school day.

Additionally, the away-from-school activities, as policy would allow, are already available to all students before and after school, as well as on weekends and throughout the summer. And finally, Ohio Revised Code supersedes board policy. So, I just wanted to point out two pieces from ORC for your consideration. One is no student may be released from core curriculum subject for religious instruction that comes from section 3313.6022. And ORC defines core subject area as reading and English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, and fine arts. And that comes from ORC 3 3 19.074.

I encourage you tonight to vote no for this policy.

Christy Leiner

Hi, I'm Christy Leiner. I'm here today as a concerned LGBTQ parent and not an educator. Two years ago, my daughter came home from Station and told me about silence day. It is a day for the LGBTQ. She also mentioned to me that teachers were also wearing t-shirts promoting this day. I never saw an email about it or heard about it. That day I realized that I needed to start researching what was actually happening in the schools. Throughout that year, my daughter would come home talking about black lives matter. I found it interesting to me because we're not a household who watches the news or talks about politics in front of the kids.

Last year, I decided to sub in Hilliard City Schools to find out for myself what was happening in the schools. During the year, I came across inappropriate books in the libraries, books on critical race theory in the classroom, kids chanting black lives matter in the hallways, a lot of sightings of the rainbow flag, poop on the bathroom floor, period blood wiped on the walls in the girls' bathroom, black lives matter projects, which elementary kids have written color throughout the hallways, a principal wearing a black sweatshirt with a Hilliard emblem made in the LGBTQ colors, and kids being pulled out of class by Syntero employees. Some of the elementary schools have the color theme as you walk into the building. In some schools, I saw more of the rainbow flag than our own American flag.

The most disappointing realization of all this is that we are focused on the incorrect thing – sexuality. Sexuality should not be the schools. Academics should be. School is for learning facts. Teachers should not teach their opinions and not promote any ideology. Students should not ever know what the teacher's political beliefs are, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation is. We all need to take a hard look at how Hilliard's rankings are decreasing and why. Kids cannot read at grade level. We are passing kids who truly didn't pass, and how this information affects the well-being of the child, not their sexuality.

My final thought is when straight kids are being bullied because of their sexuality, how do they feel safe in school? Mr. Dave Stewart signs his emails; Hillard City School District remains committed to ensuring that all students feel safe, included, and welcomed in their learning experience. If that truly is the case, then there should be no issues to give students a choice to feel more included and safe. Lifewise is a great option for students. Thank you.

Sarah Schroeder

My name is Sarah Schrader. I'm the mother of two Hilliard Davidson graduates and have been an active volunteer in the Hilliard Schools during my daughter's education. I also served a significant role in the Hilliard Schools 2016 successful levy campaign. Before the district decided to postpone next 2022 levy campaign, I'd been asked to serve as a levy chairperson and anticipate involvement once again, in the next district levy campaign. I'm here both to express my strong opposition to the proposed release time, as well as express concern for the direction of this board.

My opposition to the release time is based on the disruption of time will have on our student's academic instruction and the additional burden, the release time places of our administrators and teachers. With the complex educational challenges facing our students, our students need as much time in the classroom learning as possible, not less. Allowing them to be removed from learning in the middle of a school day goes against the heart of the public education that as a board is expected to be your first priority to guide and support. My opposition is not based on release time, specifically for religious instruction. My daughters attended several years of religious instruction. My husband and I made it a priority for them to do that after school hours. Our daughters' priority during the school day was academic instruction, a priority that I would hope the board of education for the district would share.

Finally, and most importantly, I'm very concerned about the direction and the attention this board is giving to the very real challenges facing this district at the expense of political and personal agendas. This district is an organization with an annual budget of over \$200 million, 16,000 students, approximately 8% of which are characterized as English language learners and 25% of which are eligible for free and reduced lunches. These are the students that need your direction. The idea for me of attempting to lead a levy in two years with the type of obviously anger, frustration, and division that you all are encouraging is incredibly depressing. There is no way a levy is passing in two years with this kind of division in our community. And I'm sorry, I believe that each one of you has some impact on that. This district is too important to let these kind of...*(inaudible due to crowd noise)*...enter in. I'm looking at administrators I've known for 20 years out there, and I'm so depressed for what's happening to them right now. If you want my support in two years, for this levy things will need to change on this board.

Erin Upchurch

Good evening and thank you for your time. My name is Erin Upchurch, and my pronouns are she/her. I'm a parent of two young adults, ages 18 and 20. I'm an independently licensed social worker and therapist in the state of Ohio. And I'm the Executive Director of Kaleidoscope Youth Center, Ohio's largest and long-standing organization to serve LGBTQIA youth and young adults. I am also a 1995 graduate of Davidson High School. I attended seventh and eighth grade in this very building and spent my time in primary education at brown elementary.

I'm here to thank you for your leadership and the current practices of designating safe spaces and safe people. And to encourage you to continue the work of creating environments of affirmation of belonging for all students, families, and ultimately the community as a whole. I was in third grade at Brown Elementary the first time I was the recipient of a racial slur. I was in Mrs. Johnson's class, and Todd G knocked a toy out of my hand and called me Blackie. I was also called nigger on the school bus multiple times. And in fourth grade, a cross was burned in my family's backyard fence.

I still attended school after each and every event, many of which happened on school-related grounds or facilities with my teachers, having no idea what I was going through. I didn't know that there may be safe adults and teachers with whom I could share what was happening. And there were no visible signs that if I did share, the adult would have my back and not engage in further harm. I felt lonely and embarrassed in a space where I was already existing in difference. Sometimes I imagine that had an environment of racial affirmation, acceptance, and inclusion been fostered in the early eighties, perhaps Todd and others would have reconsidered their words as a form of violence. Acknowledging the existence, humanity, and dignity of LGBTQIA+ identities have nothing to do with sex, nor does it cause folks without those identities to suddenly be compelled to join the proverbial other team. In her interview with ABC 6, Ms. Chaffee declares her desire for schools to focus on academics so, that our children are able to compete on the world stage. Interestingly, we want the same things...*(inaudible due to crowd noise)*...our children to thrive. I also want them to be well to experience life of their wholeness and humanity.

The argument of disruption or distractions along held one that was used to defend ending segregation and women working outside of the home, to name a few. Being black or another racial minority is not the same as having an LGBTQIA+ identity. However, the argument to silence or ultimately erase the existence of either has been close to the same. The world stage includes differences, and that difference includes all of us. LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults are people. They are artists, musicians, students, siblings, parents, leaders, and friends. They dream, cry, laugh, and create. They attend school and have the right to receive education in an environment that includes them in the present and past stories of humanity. They

deserve to learn ways to keep themselves safe in a relationship, to be a good friend, and to experience a sense of staff value and value for their community which will...*(buzzer sounded/3-minute time limit)*

Dawn Larsen

My name's Dawn Larsen. I'm the proud parent of three Hilliard students, two Darby alumni, and a seventh grader at Memorial. I'm urging you to vote no regarding religious release time. I sent each of you a letter and asked 10 various questions about how this policy would be implemented. No one could answer really any of those questions. So once again, we're trying to put policy in when there's no process in place. That's not good for anybody, and anybody that does change management knows that's not how you do it. There are no limits on how often a student can leave and how many organizations can participate. One of you mentioned, well, most children aren't from multiple religions, which is absolutely true. However, we have multiple churches of one religion in our district, which means a Christian student could potentially be gone every day for Christian education.

Lifewise Academy, is an organization and part of the post pilot. And we haven't really talked about the pilot. We just keep talking about a policy. My understanding is we would implement this policy and then use a pilot program with JW Reason. I took a deep dive into Lifewise, and obviously someone from the board looked forwarded my email to Lifewise and someone spoke out about it and that's totally fine. I looked up Lifewise, and they're associated organizations stand for truth in the student impact initiative. Joel Penton, their president, does make a very reasonable salary for his work with Lifewise. It's similar to mine, and I run a nonprofit. However, I don't make more than half a million year in speaking fees, which is shown on the nine nineties for...*(inaudible due to crowd noise)*...initiative.

It's not okay for Hilliard City Schools to be used as the marketing arm of what amounts to a giant grift. It's happening in the districts that implemented it. We heard about it today. They're spending marketing materials, and they're sending home permission slips. None of that is passive. It's direct marketing and about as direct as you can get. As many others have said, this would be another burden placed on stretched system of teachers and administrators. Just on Friday, a few days ago, our district had a huge challenge getting students home due to busing issues. I think a lot of us probably got emails about it. So, now we're going to add another administrative challenge. Why are we continuing to pile it on?

Finally, and to close this evening, I want to tell you all I appreciate what you do. It's not easy. I might not agree with you. In fact, there are a couple of you I definitely don't agree with, and that's okay. You're still trying to do your best. And I appreciate that. What I don't appreciate, though, and what continues to happen, is that two outspoken and politically motivated city councilmen are pressuring this board. They are pressuring you to deviate from standard policy development and robust strategic planning. I am specifically calling out Mr. Tarazi and Mr. Carrier. It's ridiculous, and I am tired of it.

E CONSENT AGENDA

- E1 Approved the following Certified Personnel actions – See attachment to the Minutes.
- E2 Approved the following Classified Personnel actions – See attachment to the Minutes.
- E3 Employment – Stipends-Non-Contractual – effective for the 2022/2023 school year: Approved an hourly rate of \$55 per hour for all staff participating in 21st Century grant activities at JW Reason Elementary.

E4 Approved the following student trip requests:

- a. Davidson Girls Basketball, Canfield, OH – December 28, 2022
- b. Davidson Varsity Softball, Pigeon Forge, TN & Willow Wood, OH – April 1, 2023

The Board of Education approved items E1 through E4, including certified and classified personnel matters. You can find the complete list of personnel matters as an attachment to the Minutes.

Mr. Perry noted the two retirements on tonight’s agenda. We have Jeff Decker, physical education teacher, who has been with the district since 1997. And, Barbara Ratcliff, secretary, who has been with the district since 1991.

F ACTION AGENDA

F1 The Board of Education approved the following Summer 2022 Graduates:

Darby High School

Samuel Ray Becker
Ghemar Yousef Abdel Jabbar
Alexandra Duryea Jones

Davidson High School

Alehegne Kebebew Abay
Andrew Joseph Thurman Makowski
Haboon Isa Sugulleh

Congratulations!

F2 The Board of Education held the third reading and adopted the following policies:

- a. JEFB – Released Time for Religious Instruction

Mr. Stewart asked for a motion. Mrs. Crowley asked if that would be a motion for a first reading of the OSBA version. Mr. Perry replied that’s a good question. If we have a language change to the same policy as the third reading, does it have to go back to policy (review)? Every policy has to come before the policy committee before being recommended to the board. Does this count as a language change or a new policy proposal? Mr. Stewart replied I don’t believe so.

Mrs. Crowley stated she had a lot of questions about this policy. It says that the parent has to submit a written request for them to go. So, that would not be the signing of a permission slip. That would be the parent writing in a request. It's not a permission. It's a request. So, I have questions about this policy that just came before me this evening that I have not even had time to read.

Mrs. Long said she would read it. So, in the policy manual section J student, the title is release time for religious instruction, the code is JEFB, and the status is from OSBA. Released time for religious instruction.

The board permits students to be released from school for religious instruction, consistent with law. Absent during the day for the religious instruction is permitted provided:

1. The student's parents or guardians submit a written request to the building principal.
2. The private entity providing instruction maintains absent attendance records. It makes them available to the district.
3. The student is not absent for core curriculum subject courses.

The district is not responsible for transportation to or from the place of instruction. Regular classroom instruction missed as a result of a student's absence for religious instruction will not be made up for and students assume responsibility for any missed school work. Students are not considered absent from school while attending a release course in religious instruction. The district does not aid, assist, or enforce attendance in a religious instruction program. The district does not discriminate against students who participate in such a program. No public funds are expended and no public school personnel are involved in providing religious instruction.

This policy is not intended and shall not be constructed in any way to assist the district with any faith or religious denomination.

And then there are cross references: IGAC-Teaching about religion, JED-Student absences and excuses, and KJA-Distribution of materials in the schools

Note: House Bill 171, 2014 enacted Ohio revised code 3313.622 specifying the conditions under which a board may have thought the policy of release time for religious instruction. Districts also may choose to add language to the policy authorizing high school students to earn elective credit towards graduation through released time courses provided statutory requirements are met when evaluating the course for credit. The decision to award the credit for the release time course for religious instruction must be neutral too, and cannot involve any test for religious content or denominational affiliation.

Districts should work with the board counsel to implement such programs. On April 17th, 2019, the Ohio attorney general released a new opinion, 2019 through dash zero one class on release time religious instruction, which focuses on what school district's policies may permit and prohibit and the implementation of these policies.

The opinions analyze and resolve several specific questions and scenarios. Districts are cautioned to keep in mind that these scenarios and questions are effect specific and rely on certain assumptions. As the facts change, so may the answers. Districts shall work with board counsel to assess legal compliance when implementing these policie.

Legal references are: US Constitution Amendment 1, ORC 3313.20, ORC 3313.47, ORC 3313.6022, and ORC 3321.04.

So this is the policy that our state school board association has provided. And that is what is up for a vote.

Mrs. Crowley said you mentioned that the district does not discriminate against students participating in such a program. But, still, there's no mention of not discriminating against students who do not participate in the program. And there's no mention of whether or not students can miss lunch, especially if they're the Title I low-income school that provides free lunch to them.

Mrs. Long asked if there was any other discussion. Mr. Perry responded that he almost always hesitates, but thank you for first reading it into the record. I do appreciate that, and I'm sure everyone out there also appreciates that. One of our speakers who spoke today struck me by saying, I love you, everyone in the crowd. It was weird for me to hear it. And I think that's because we don't say that enough. I think he's right. I think that's true. His point was to say, look, we may disagree on things but don't let the disagreements go beyond policy. Don't make them personal. Sometimes it's irritating to hear things I disagree with, but I understand it's coming from a place of love. And just briefly, everything has really

been said about this policy. I'd like to mention we are not the first district that has done this policy. That's true. I've spoken with other districts about this policy, and they have the same issues that everyone assumed may happen here. And it worries me because they have students who come back late consistently. They miss core time, and that's against the law. So, who's punished for that? Who is held accountable? We talk about accountability, and the reality is they're marking their students as truant. It's not the student's fault they're coming back late. It's the organization that's getting them back late. And if that happens consistently, do we have a mechanism to say, hey, this is not working? I don't know that we do. And then finally, we had a letter from every elementary administrator (16 principals) stating in detail that this is disruptive for the remaining students. It's an incredible burden to our teachers and administrators. When they say this will affect their classroom time and schools, I have to trust those professionals when they say; I don't think this is a good idea for us right now. And I, I appreciate that. I do,

Mr. Wilson told Mrs. Long that no one had made a motion yet. Mrs. Long asked if someone would like to make a motion. Mrs. Murdoch motioned to have the third reading and adopt policy JEFB. Mr. Vorst seconded the motion.

Mrs. Long asked if there was any other discussion. Mrs. Murdoch said, first of all, I want to say how impressed I am by the passion expressed by so many of you in your emails. Thank you to everyone who had one-on-one conversations with me and the public comments we heard tonight. Regardless of everyone's opinion on this policy, in these discussions, I found that the one thing that unites us is that we all love our children and want what's best for them. So, I was really moved by many of the stories you shared with us about how art, music, theater, or religious instruction had enriched your lives. So, thank you so much for sharing that with us. As a district, we celebrate many different holidays, sexual identities, ethnic cultures, and religions, and we need to give them all the same consideration. There are a lot of examples of programs being implemented successfully across our state. I also had conversations with board members and administrators of other districts in central Ohio that have these policies. Problems are the exception. They said, as a rule, they really didn't notice any disruption or problems. So, I have to accept what their experience has been and have faith in our administrators to be able to react similarly. Not only do religious release programs attract strong families to the communities where they're offered, but the national council and private delinquency research indicated that students gain significant academic benefits when religious instruction is offered in conjunction with their regular academic pursuits. Finally, no one loves and cares more for a child's safety and well-being than their parents. Without this policy, I feel Hilliard schools are taking a radically descriptive stance on parental choice and understanding how parents are involved in their kids' schooling compared to other districts in Ohio.

Mr. Vorst added I don't want to belabor anything everybody else has said. I want to express more appreciation and thanks to everybody in the community for reaching out. The vast majority of our emails and contacts with everybody have been very professional and understanding, and I'm proud to be a part of this community. I have three little kids that go to school here, and we're not going anywhere. We support this community and are proud to be a part of it. I knew people were coming here tonight, wearing red. I knew there'd be people coming here tonight, wearing rainbow colors, blue, and all kinds of different colors. I chose Hilliard blue. That's what I wanted to wear. Cause we are on team Hilliard, and half the people in this room may be upset when we leave tonight, but please know that we are all on the same team. I view it that way. I think everyone on the board views it that way. We want to leave not as enemies but as people who disagree on something, and hopefully, we move forward as one community. Thank you.

Mrs. Long added that the only comment I want to make is tonight is an important time for us as a community. We have had lots of input and dialogue, and I would like the record to show that I met with

six of our Hilliard City Council members over this policy. So, I definitely did my homework, and this policy has been through our policy committee. So that you know, the OSBA version was originally submitted to the policy committee. There were five readings with the board, including the dialogue between the board members and the public. I appreciate everyone's energy and input through this process and am proud of the journey as a board and community. Through this process, I was recognized as the least opinionated by many. At the conclusion of the first second reading, I worked through the actions I told our community I would do. I needed to understand the legislation and the current status. I needed to review with legal counsel. I needed to process the current academic goals. I needed that process and community feedback. And that's when we got our Fallon survey. And I also needed to know if this policy would affect the HEA contract. So, I just want to make sure that you all are aware. We're going to go ahead and move to vote.

Someone from the audience: A point of information for the chair's order. In your statement, are you referring to the current language that you're voting on or the prior iteration in terms of discussing with people and going through policy? So if we could clarify, are you talking about what we're voting on now or the prior document?

Mrs. Long responded that we are voting on the policy I just read.

The speaker from the audience added your remarks about reviewing it with the council and the other committees and things like that. Did they see the current language you're discussing for a vote?

Mrs. Long replied yes, the legal counsel I spoke to had this version in front of them.

Mrs. Crowley said I would just like to thank everyone for being here. I stand with all our students, including our LGBTQIA students and our educators in Hilliard. And I cannot wait to vote no on this policy. So we'll get to it.

Mr. Perry added, and one thing real quick, regardless of the outcome, we all need to make sure that we are supporting what the board decides to make sure that this works as well as it can work for our students.

Mr. Perry and Mrs. Crowley voted no. Mrs. Murdoch, Mr. Vorst, and Mrs. Long voted yes. The motion passed. Mrs. Long also made the following statement: My decision tonight is based on how I see us currently functioning as a district and moving forward with our parents and community to continue to meet our mission of ready for tomorrow. We currently have character-based programming in our schools, which is driven by parent consent. Adoption of this policy provides state-supported guidelines for such programming and allows us to consistently provide opportunities. I see this policy as an additional tool for our parents and district to support students' needs. Participating in this activity will require parent consent. The responsibility of the programming falls on groups, and the policy provides state-supported guidance. I trust our parents, our administration, teachers, community groups, and staff, to continue to meet our needs of students. My vote is yes.

F3 The Board of Education authorized the payment of \$16,840 to MSquared LLC.

Mr. Wilson explained that, as you recall, we had a van run into the central office warehouse this summer and took out part of the wall. Although, we thought that the insurance company was paying the vendor for the repair, the insurance company sent us the check. Ohio Revised Code requires that you have a purchase order before the work is completed. Since we did not think we were writing a check to the

vendor, we did not create a purchase order. So, the board has to approve the purchase in a situation like this, where the amount is above \$3,000.

G REPORTS / INFORMATION / EXHIBIT ITEM

G1 Committee Reports

Mr. Vorst said the superintendent's advisory committee has not kicked off yet. For everyone's reference, that committee meets once a month during the school year. Everyone puts superintendent Stewart in the hot seat. He answers questions from staff members live and unscripted, and he does a great job most of the time. So, that's not started yet. It starts later this month.

Mr. Vorst reported that the facilities committee met last Friday and discussed the summer project update. The result was everything went well. The preschool is open. The addition is very well received, and many little tykes are running around over there. So, it's going very well. We have a facilities database with an inventory of all our facilities. We have around \$500 million worth of real estate in our portfolio. The upkeep of that is a very thorough, ongoing process. So, we got an update on that. We had a really nice presentation on what clubs, groups, or sports are using our facilities. It is helpful information. The master facilities plan was updated. They are meeting again later this week. This is a group of professionals who meet to devise a plan for what to do with all of our buildings in the future. We talked about buildings grounds requests briefly, and about projects for next summer. We also got a safety update that was mostly led by Mike McDonough and Cliff Hetzel. It was a great meeting.

Mr. Vorst also reported that the health insurance committee met recently. We discussed pricing and plans for drug purchasing contracts regarding the pharmacy benefit renewal and some other options with representatives from HEA, OAPSE, and other staff members and leadership.

And finally, the finance committee met. We got approached about an issue about expanding our busing. To make a long story short, we are so short of bus drivers that expanding our busing would not be feasible. So, if anybody here has a CDL, can drive a bus, and wants to help us out, please see superintendent Stewart afterward. It's a very competitive market.

Mr. Perry reported he attended the OSBA fall legislative update along with President Long and Superintendent Stewart. Most things in the General Assembly are stalled, apparently waiting on lame duck. However, there is a proposal to have teachers post all their instructional materials on their websites.

Mrs. Long reported that she was unable to attend the school board/city council meeting this last Friday due to the facilities committee meeting. So, we'll continue next.

H ADJOURNMENT

H1 The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.