

Open letter to BESE District 6 Candidate Jason Engen,

In a recent article regarding your candidacy, when asked about regulating homeschool, you indicated that you believed that homeschoolers should be subjected to "high standards similar to what public and private schools are subjected." In a response to a parent, you indicated that you believe in "empowering parents and putting all options on the table for them to seek out the best educational opportunity possible;" and that you wanted to meet with homeschool parents so you could "be their advocate." Whether you were prepared to answer the question about homeschooling or not as you indicated, your response reveals that you have, at least, considered the idea of regulating homeschool. I would like to address several issues of concern I have regarding your response in *The Hayride* and your candidacy in general.

First, I would like to address your response in *The Hayride* regarding homeschooling. You indicated you wanted to subject homeschoolers to the same standards as public and private schools. I am concerned with your utilization of the word "subject," which means to force or to bring under control. You stated later in your response to a parent that you were misunderstood and wanted to be an advocate for homeschool parents. At this time, Louisiana citizens enjoy liberal homeschool laws and do not require someone to "advocate" for them. The current educational policies and reforms mandated in our public schools today began under the banner of "advocating" for parents. Recently a political PAC has adopted the mantra of "Empowering Parents." Over the past two years, parents have attended BESE and legislative meetings to express their concerns and/or rejection of current reforms such as the Common Core State Standards, charter schools, and the PARCC test. Yet, they were treated with derision and disrespect. They were mocked, then dismissed while members of BESE rammed through policy after policy. These reforms do not empower parents. Parents from New Orleans, a city home to the national experiment of an all charter district, had to drive to Baton Rouge to address BESE because their schools' boards are not locally elected by its citizens but rather appointed by private entities. As such, traveling to BESE was their only recourse. You can view any number of the recorded BESE hearings to witness them pleading before a disinterested board for their schools back. The reforms and policies being advocated by the people who are endorsing, supporting, and funding you do not empower. They subject students, parents, and communities to a vision of education championed by big business and special interest groups. As a result, many parents are choosing, in greater numbers, to homeschool to escape the "straight-jacketed" approach to education our state officials have embraced through a flawed accountability system of standardization and high stakes testing.

Second, I would like to address the concept of "higher standards," by which I believe you mean the Common Core standards. Many of us have said this over and over again, and yet it continues to fall on deaf ears. There is NO INDEPENDENT body of empirical research that supports the assertion that the Common Core standards are of a higher quality than what states had before. NONE. Stories about how teachers love "teaching" Common Core, how much students love "learning" the Common Core way, or how teachers "believe" their students are doing better are not evidence that these standards are effective in raising student achievement. They are simply statements of opinion. Arguments that the PARCC test is a better indicator of student achievement are based on assumptions, not evidence, as

there is NO INDEPENDENT body of research that supports the reliability or validity of this test. In addition, there is NO INDEPENDENT body of empirical research that supports the assertion that standards, in and of themselves, will improve student achievement. Studies have found little, if any, significant correlation between standards and student achievement. In fact, a research study I conducted, which I would be happy to provide, examining the quality ranking of individual state standards and scores from the NAEP (i.e., the national test by which states are ranked) yielded evidence that, in fact, an inverse relationship may exist. Yet regardless of the lack of evidence, regardless of the concerns expressed by parents, regardless of the concerns expressed by districts that have had to forgo their own programs of improvement in order to comply with state mandates, state officials continue to invest enormous amounts of time and public dollars into this initiative with the hopes this experiment will be of benefit.

Lastly, I chose to homeschool my son and now grandson because I do not value the type of education currently offered in public schools as a result of mandated state policies. I value a classical, traditional education which it seems can only be found now in elite private schools. I do not value an education reduced to "teaching to a test" so that my son or grandson can perform for the benefit of those who would seek bragging rights ("my state is better than yours") or to use them as human capital to improve the state's economic outlook.

Unfortunately because of the control business and special interest groups have on educational policy in this state, homeschooling has become the last refuge of freedom for parents who wish to have more control over the direction and quality of their children's education. Since you have been endorsed by people and organizations which have in the past supported imposing their vision of education on the citizenry, I have no reason to believe you will be critical of current reform policies and every reason to believe you will promote them. And because you have expressed that you would like to see homeschoolers "subjected" to the same, I have to believe, if elected, you would be open to considering policies that would set their sights on homeschoolers.

Sincerely,

Dr. Elizabeth Meyers