

Low-Performing Schools Testimony
Submitted by Robert and Shannon Lawson
Harrisburg Christian School Parents

My name is Shannon Lawson, and my husband Rob and I have three children, two of which attend Harrisburg Christian School. We have lived in Harrisburg City for most of the thirteen years we have been married. We are both pastors in an inner-city church in Harrisburg and have worked with at-risk youth for the last seven years.

I am here today to express to you as a parent, the need for access to educational options and opportunities for students from low-performing schools. Our family has had the incredible privilege of receiving an OSTC scholarship for our children to attend Harrisburg Christian School. My oldest daughter started attending in first grade after spending kindergarten in a Harrisburg City School. She wasn't doing well, getting lost in a class well over thirty students. She was struggling to read and had great difficulty identifying even common sight words.

Realizing she wasn't going to excel there, we were able to transfer her to Harrisburg Christian School. Within her first year there, her teacher quickly identified there was an issue and recommended getting her tested. From there we found out she had dyslexia.

Faced with this disability, we realized if we pulled her out of the environment she was in and back into public school, she would get lost. Fortunately, because of the program targeting low-performing schools, we were able to keep her there. Through the next couple years, she struggled, but even with limited resources, the teachers and programs at the school were able to do something I didn't know would be possible...they cultivated in her a love for reading and taught her strategies on how to process reading for her specific difficulty. And amazingly, it worked.

Today my daughter loves to read and write to no end. If you ask her what she wants to become when she grows up, she will give you a huge smile and tell you she wants to become an author.

This has only happened because we were able to put her in a school that made it their goal to make her successful, despite the challenges. Because of the school district we live in, I'm afraid of what might have happened if she hadn't been given that opportunity.

Right now, she is currently a seventh grader with an A/B average, taking a 9th grade level math and consistently in the high 90's in English and Literature. I would have liked her to come today, but she's actually taking her final exams today for one of those classes.

I believe in this school and am absolutely grateful for the opportunities our family have been afforded due to these programs. Because of this scholarship, our location or our income didn't determine the opportunities given to my child, and I would love to see others like us, be able to experience what we have, and see their children excel in ways beyond their expectations.