

Bedford students say issue is local control

International Baccalaureate:

House Bill would threaten schools' use of program.

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CONCORD — Bearing signs and stickers reading “Defeat HB 1403,” more than 100 students from Bedford High School filled a State House hearing room to capacity Tuesday to express their opposition to a bill targeting the school’s International Baccalaureate (IB) program. House Bill 1403 would prevent school districts from adopting curricula that “are subject to the governance of a foreign body or organization,” and it would establish a commission to study the IB program.

The House passed the bill in March. It’s now being considered by the Senate Education Committee.

Backers of the bill say IB, which was founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 1968, promotes an international ideology and is linked to the United Nations through the organization UNESCO.

“Do you want your children to be indoctrinated to be world citizens or do you want them to be residents of this state and this country,” asked bill sponsor Rep. Ralph Boehm, R-Litchfield.

Boehm said there were also concerns that school districts contracting with IB could run afoul of a U.S. law that bars any government aid to UNESCO due to its recent recognition of a Palestinian state. He said he’s contacted members of the state’s Congressional delegation for clarification on the issue.



has been recognized as a nongovernmental organization of UNESCO since 1970 and currently has the status of “formal consultative relations as a network” with UNESCO.

Supporters of the International Baccalaureate program, which is offered in two school districts in New Hampshire, Bedford and Merrimack Valley, dismissed some of the claims against IB as narrow-minded. But their primary concern was that HB 1403 violated the principle of local school board control.

“If you would want to strip and usurp the authority of a local school board ... then we need to come up with a new motto for our license plates than ‘Live Free or Die,’” said Bedford High junior Michael Courtney, one of the main organizers of a campaign against the bill that includes a YouTube video called “Save IB in NH.”

The local control issue is also a priority for Sen. Ray White, the Bedford Republican and self-described “libertarian conservative.”

“However you feel about IB personally — I’ve been adamant, curriculum decisions should be made at the local level,” he said.

Around 300 students participate in the IB program at Bedford High, which is offered as college preparatory track for juniors and seniors. Merrimack Valley started to use the curriculum this year in its five elementary schools.

At the high-school level, students can receive college credit for IB coursework.

The IB organization offers curricula for grades K-12 in more than 3,300 schools in 141 countries, with the goal of creating “a better world through intercultural understanding,” according to its website.

While opponents of the bill far outnumbered supporters at Tuesday’s hearing, Bedford resident David Murray said there were many parents who had concerns about the program.

“Any time you mention that this is a UN-supported organization, it tends to elicit sneers and snickers. I know that intimidates a lot of people from speaking out,” said Murray, who is the parent of a Bedford High student whom he said participated in the IB program and was “not impressed.”

School officials in Bedford testified that they had carefully reviewed all the claims made by IB critics and found them unfounded.

Superintendent Tim Mayes said IB teachers have considerable autonomy in assigning material and that the instruction does not “preempt study of U.S. history or civics,” which are required subjects.

Lorrie Carey, a member of the Merrimack Valley school board, said it decided to adopt the curriculum for its grade schools after three years of review and consideration.

The international focus was secondary to an educational approach that emphasizes dialogue and understanding, said Carey, who attended with her daughter. “I see a different language coming out of my child. She is thoughtful and caring. This is about problem-solving. It’s a different way of teaching students.”

The committee is expected to vote on the bill Friday.