

Tonya Heald

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December 16th, 2024

Dear Members of the Salmon School District,

I am writing to share my thoughts on finding out our classrooms in the Salmon School District are displaying the Transgender flag. My intention is not to cause division, but to inform both the School District and our community of the mistakes that can be made by school staff encouraging complex situations that they are not qualified to understand. Especially if they do not consult parents when helping students to make life changing decisions. I am aware that the flag is not just being displayed in classrooms to make students that may have different beliefs feel welcome and safe, as it's being portrayed. I am aware of this firsthand, and I feel my story needs to be heard.

I had a beautiful daughter. She grew up like a lot of little girls do, dressing up in princess gowns with tiaras was one of her favorite past times. She had a whole dress-up box full. She loved to pick out her own clothes, most of which were pink, and she loved dresses. She wanted to be Cinderella for three years in a row for Halloween. Well, four, actually, but trying to get her to mix things up a little, I managed to get her to compromise and be Tinkerbell. In fact, she was so "girly" that sometimes, as a tomboy myself, she drove me crazy, but I embraced her how she was. She was my little princess.

Fast forward to her at 11 years old. She was molested in her own bedroom, by an adult that should have been a trusted friend, not a monster lurking for opportunities to catch children alone. Not shockingly, it caused a lot of emotional trauma. We went to counseling both together, and separately. It was awful. As she grew, at around 14, she began to suffer from



gender dysphoria, which is not uncommon for what she went through. In her mind, she started to rewrite her history. She had become convinced that because she loved the Jurassic Park movies growing up, that it was a great example of why she should really be a boy. Literally, that is the childhood thought process that started us down the road, that I can't believe I'm on now. I brought this up to her counselor and as a parent, she told me I had the right to ban her from buying the boy's clothes she was beginning to buy at the time. I didn't think that was necessary, I just wanted my daughter to love herself again, so that she could find her own way. She was so feminine before the traumatizing incident, I felt for sure she would work through it. Honestly, I think to this day, she would have found her way, if the Salmon educators, and possibly the school counselor, as well, by directing them, hadn't thought that they knew more about my daughter than I did, as her mother.

I think it began around the time she turned 16, although the exact time I do not know, because it was done behind my back. At some point my daughter began going by a boy's name. One that she didn't even pick out, her friends did, so even that she was unsure about, and she did not tell me or her counselor at that time. Then the staff at the Salmon High School also thought they would start calling her by her new name, having absolutely no conversations with me about this. None of them spoke to me about this, or I could have told them her history and why affirming this decision was a bad idea. They didn't know she had already been and was still in counseling, they just made a decision without me, thinking they knew better than the person that knew her best her whole life. They were reaffirming her gender dysphoria without even trying to ask me before offering their so called help.

By the time I found out what the staff thought was best for my daughter, she was 18 telling me she's going on hormones and there's nothing I could do about it. And now, at 22, before her brain is even finished developing, she just had a double mastectomy.

So no, this is not just a flag that welcomes students that are different into their classrooms. This is educators and staff thinking they are qualified to make decisions that can affect a child's mental health. My daughter in particular, I think, highlights the fact that the educators and the school are not at all qualified to make decisions for students, in place of their parents. Furthermore, because I was never allowed to be part of the conversations they had with my daughter, I do not even know if the staff was just reaffirming my daughter's mental health issues, or if they actually manipulated her thinking. Either way, it was wrong.

Unlike the other parents here, I am not happy with the way that the educators and staff are supposedly having a positive impact on our children's lives. In fact, I wonder if in the future, when my child's brain finishes developing, she, like me, will blame the school for encouraging her to make decisions she will not be able to take back. A decision they made without her parent or actual counselor she was seeing for trauma already. I hope all the educators and staff think about how they affect children's lives. They should realize they do not know everything,

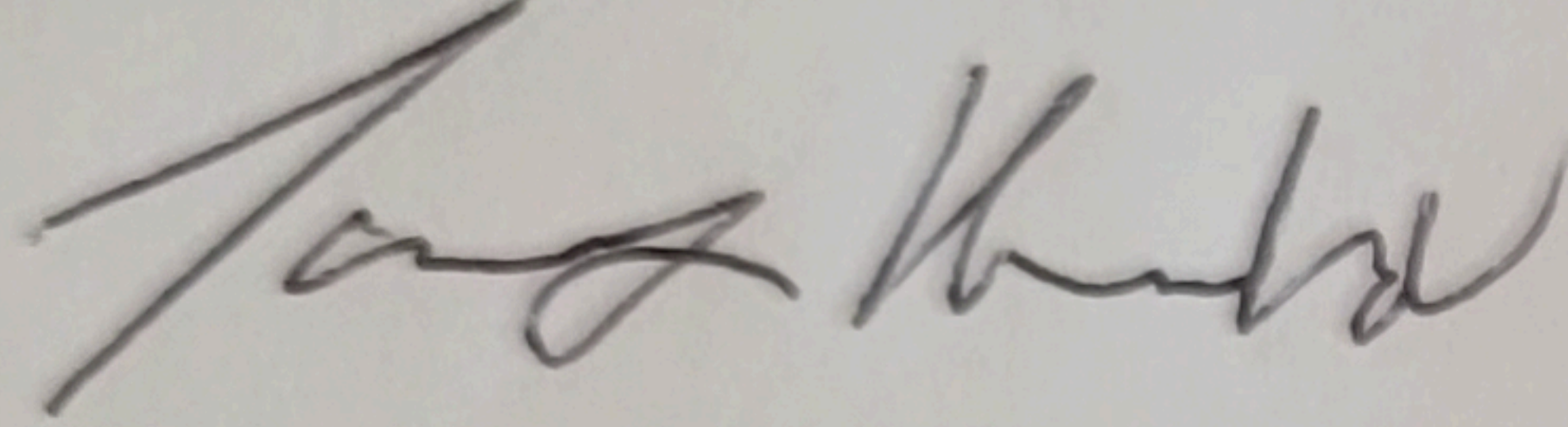


especially when it comes to mental health. They failed my daughter.

This flag represents the staff thinking they know more than parents. What I have lived through specifically highlights why the staff is completely under qualified in making life changing decisions without even trying to consult the parents. This flag needs to be taken down immediately, and the flawed thinking that it represents.

Thank you to the Salmon School District for taking the time to hear my story, and I hope you take this matter seriously, and work on educating the staff at the Salmon Schools about mental health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tonya Heald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Tonya Heald