



OSEA members working as educational assistants, school bus drivers, and in other positions are often required to work in dangerous conditions, and many are being injured. The following letters were submitted by OSEA members from across the state. At their request, individual's names have been removed for fear of retaliation.

Dear Lawmakers,

Thank you for your consideration of HB 3045 and hearing what our daily life in school involves.

In the fall of 2009, I was assigned to work with a 14 year old student with severe autism. The student was of an adult weight of about 160 lbs and much taller than my 5'3" frame. I was told by a former para-pro, "She bites." School records indicated a habitual biter from age 5.

September 14, 2009, I was bitten on my left forearm. I was in shock, shaking and my arm was bruised and bloody. I was treated on-site at the school health clinic.

Again, on September 30, 2009, I was bitten on the right upper arm. Again, I visited the school clinic. I was extremely stressed and again went into shock. I began having nightmares and did not want to return to work. My stomach churned and my husband suggested I quit my job. By this time this student was baring teeth at me, grabbing at my limbs and chasing me around the classroom. The student screamed a blood curdling scream that sounded like a panther when upset. Shivers ran down my spine and adrenaline rushed through my body. Now, please note that there are other students in the very same room that hear or witness the incidents. They too are of special needs, either physical or academic.

October 12, 2009 I received my third bite to the inner aspect of my right forearm. I received two puncture wounds from the student's teeth. I received an antibiotic which I took and also received a tetanus shot the same day. My doctor measured and documented the injury during my visit. A claim was submitted to S.A.I.F.. Seven months later the bite scars were still visible.

October 15, 2009, the students lunged at me, snapping their teeth. The next day the student attempted to scratch me. When I attempted to move the student to another area, the student kicked me in the knee.

When I discussed all these issues and how traumatic they were to me, I was told that as a public school, "We must accept students in whatever condition they arrive." But then said, we do not have to keep them. This was NOT my experience. The student's parents disallowed us to send the student home for biting. They insist this has been tried and the student's behavior escalated in aggression at school after being sent home the day before.

November 17, 2009. I witnessed this student bite another students fingers. Staff protected the victim from more serious injury.

November 25, 2009. During transport in a school district vehicle, this student began to body slam the seat in front of her. The student leaned forward and raked the neck of student #2, who was a non-verbal student. I pulled student #2 forward to lessen the chances of a second attack. Meanwhile the student put their foot almost to the headrest in attempts to kick student #2. The student kicked the seat violently. I moved closer to the victim to try to protect them better and would rather take the attack than the student hurt #2.

December 2, 2009. This student stood and lunged over an oblong work table toward me-teeth bared. I deflected hand blows and told her to sit. Three minutes later, the student scratched me.

December 3, 2009, there were four incidents at the swimming pool. While in the pool the student lunged at a pool staff member walking near poolside. The student was asked to swim at a different direction, but student kept swimming toward other students. Suddenly the student started swimming rapidly toward a specific student. The coach tried to intervene and other student swam as fast as possible, however the student chasing caught up and attempted to bite. The coach jumped in to separate them. The other student, traumatized, scared, and upset exited the pool and moved away. The student got out of pool and starting chasing again. Again, more staff intervened. As staff attempted to help student change clothes, the student lunged at me.

All efforts to protect myself via the Special Ed Director were deflected as student needs were discussed. I was told, that I could be considered as insubordinate for refusing to work with this student. Help! When do student rights supersede staff and other student's safety and rights? Please be a part of making a difference in the other student's lives and workers like me that do this for the love of these children, only to feel unsafe and stressed to walk in the door!

Respectfully submitted,

Baker School District

Education Assistant

To Lawmakers,

I am currently a custodian in the North Clackamas School District. About five years ago I was a night custodian at a nearby high school. Part of my cleaning assignment was a building about a mile and a half from the high school that was referred to as the "village." At that time it was actually part of Oregon Trail Elementary school. My work shift was from 3:15pm to 11:45pm. I started at the high school and then drove to the village to finish the night. I worked there alone.

One night there had been an outside group using the large meeting room. After they left I checked the doors and they appeared to be locked. My mistake was not pushing on the door to make sure the latch was secure. When I was finished vacuuming for the night I was coiling the extension cord for the vacuum, which is a back pack type, when a young male jumped out from behind a wall where he had been hiding and ran full force into me knocking me over. He then put a stun gun in my neck and demanded money. I told him to get off me and finally he did. Between being knocked down with a back pack vacuum on my back and the stun gun I was pretty disoriented. He threatened me again so I gave him the money in my pocket and he ran out, advising me not to follow or I would be hurt so I watched him run outside. I could not tell where he went.

I again checked the doors, this time pushing on them and discovered one of them had a rock placed on the door lock plunger which kept it open. At some point in the night this guy then entered the building, hid, and jumped me when I was alone and my back turned to him. The police were called and a report filed.

I am now older and not much of a fighter so that night I probably would not have done a whole lot different except making sure the doors were shut and latched. Now days more and more bad guys are armed and its just not worth it to put up a fight. I think being careful while at work and following safety guidelines are extremely important.

Most of our schools have night and weekend activities and facility users are often given keys or alarm cards to enter the buildings and they are responsible to lock up and arm the building when done. That usually works out pretty good, but what happens is someone will prop a door open to the outside, even though it is unlocked, so others can get in. The problem is getting the facility users to stop doing that. Open doors are invitations for anyone to come in. Custodians are responsible for the care and custody of the building they are working in. Often time at night they are working alone in an elementary school.

Thank you for your time

North Clackamas School District
Custodian

Dear Lawmakers:

I have been employed by the school district for 12 years. In the last four years I have been kicked; bitten; scratched; injured; vomited on; and spit on. My work is causing constant physical, mental, emotional, and psychological stress to my everyday life.

As a Para-professional I take pride in working with children that I know, for most of them, will never reach a grade/developmental stage in their life to be on their own. I am trusted by their parents, my co-workers, and other students around me to care and provide the safest environment possible.

I willingly carry the burden, but honestly, it takes a lot of energy from me when I myself feel that I am constantly trying to “protect”, instead of educate, those around me. I have precious, beautiful lives to teach and I do it with pride. However, there needs to be policy to protect everyone’s rights to safety, at all times.

Thank you,

Para- Professional
Baker School District

Dear Lawmakers,

I work in special education in a self contained classroom.

I had a student who injured me 11 times over the course of 2 years and also injured my coworkers many times. My final injury resulted in me leaving work to go to the emergency room. I was unable to work from April 13th through the end of the school year. In this last case the principal was injured when he pulled the student off of me.

At one point there were 4 employees off work on the same day, all of us with injuries caused by this student. This student had also attacked another student in the hall resulting in 2 employees being injured while trying to protect a different student.

Over the period of time that we had this student he bit, scratched the face and eye of a teacher, hit and threw things at us. The student never received punishment for his behavior because his actions were a result of his disability. We asked many times for more support but were denied by our district.

Classroom Assistant
Gresham- Barlow School District

March 19, 2013

To Lawmakers:

In the 12 years that I have worked in the school system first as a teaching assistant and later as a Para Professional I have been privileged to work with a variety of students some with special needs.

The most dangerous student I worked with would attack people. She wasn't allowed out with the main student body. Do to a lack of communication skills it was difficult to understand why and thus when she would attack. I was given training at the beginning of the school year on how to defend myself if all else failed. This student did attack me at least three times. I was targeted by the student many more times and needed to break eye contact in order not to be attacked, the other Para Professional figured out about breaking eye contact. After the brief lessons on self defense at the beginning of the year, no refresher courses were held to keep what you learned fresh in your mind. This student required two adults at all times due to the unpredictability of her actions. She would hold you hand nice one moment the scratch or bite you the next.

Sincerely,

Para Professional

Baker School District

Good Morning,

As educators and caring human beings our ultimate goal is to help mentally, physically and medically challenged children to learn daily life skills, manage interactions, gain a sense of accomplishment, and feel a sense of positive self worth. We want them to become as independent as they can possibly be. Our jobs are never the less extremely challenging and stressful on many levels.

We are subjected on a daily basis to possible bites, kicks, scratches, foul smells, verbal abuse, irate parents, disrespectful leaders, mental stress and physical injuries. Several of us in fact have suffered injuries from students requiring medical attention, counseling and recovery time. Stress is a constant companion.

In addition my job has been threatened with termination if I were not to carry out certain tasks that I am not able to perform. Medical documentation was provided and ignored by those in charge.

Why do I do my job? Because I care! Because a smile or laughter, or perhaps a moment of freedom for a child who is enduring the pain and misfortunes from an unfair life deserves all of the empathy, encouragement, and hope I can give. It is the least we can do for the less fortunate. God bless them!

Can our working environment be safer and healthier for us and the children? Most certainly yes! We demand that it be! It is a small thing to ask. We welcome your visit; you will leave a different person.

Your consideration of HB 3045 is appreciated, have a great day.

Para Professional
Baker School District

Dear Lawmakers,

To work daily in high school classrooms is quite an eye opener to the average citizen. Every day I am grateful of the safe, healthy, upbringing provided by my ever present and guiding parents that valued my well-being and education. Every child born is deserving of such a nurturing stable life.

What I have found in the past twelve years, are many students whose lives have been literally broken and they lack the skills to pick up the pieces and move forward effectively in their lives. Their unstable foundations stem from disappointments due to events such as divorce, incarceration, addiction or death of one or both parents and the resulting feeling abandonment that leaves a person with anger and distrust in others.

Their lives meet mine in the high school classroom. Earlier this year, a couple of students were asked to catch up on a science lab together. Apparently the much larger student was very angry and took it out on the other lightweight student, grabbing him around his neck (right in front of me) and pushed him all the way over to the counter, holding the student's neck flat back on the counter until the male teacher came over to break it up. That student has had anger issues prior to that resulting his being sent to the office a number of times. This event was quite unsettling for me, as well as for other students. He had really snapped.

Even tonight as I write this letter, I am not sure as to my safety in that situation or others. Sometimes I wake up at 4 am. in the morning and think about the situations and individuals that I work with and wonder if I would be just safer to leave my job and avoid the possible dangers involved.

As I mentioned before, there are more students, with anger, trust and bullying issues. These young people, particularly at their age, lack the "tool box" to deal with the emotions that often prevent them from learning. Eventually this turns into a repeating cycle of failed parenting due to parental abandonment, addiction, incarceration and result in the expression of anger with themselves or expressed at others, possibly suicide or murder. These are not bad people but broken lives that are desperately in need of professional counseling and community support.

Again, all children deserve the help they need to cope in this world and we owe it to all the children and the staff to provide a safe environment every day in our schools.

Thank you for your time.

Para-professional

Eastern Oregon

Dear Lawmakers,

I have worked with disabled students for at least 15 of the 17 years in the Hermiston school district. In this time I have been bitten, scratched, head butted, lips split open, and thumb joint destroyed.

Years back I was working with a kindergarten student that would try to attack other students and had problems staying in her seat. I had been pulling this student out of class to a quiet work space to learn what was expected classroom work, and behavior for a few months. She was doing class work and was starting to interact with other classmates. When working at her table one morning she got upset grabbed a pair of scissors reached across the table and tried to stab another student. I grabbed her hand then removed her from the classroom. While out in the hallway she grabbed my left thumb and pulled it backward, while laughing. She was restrained with her attempting to hit, bite, and scratch. After calming her down we went to the special education room where we could talk about what happened and get her calmed down so that she would be able to ride the bus home. After she left I went to the doctor and found that she had torn the tendons and connective tissue in my left thumb first joint area. I have since had to have reconstructive surgery on the joint. I will never be able to use that thumb or joint again without pain.

I also now have nerve damage in the neck from a student head butting me. I live with pain and numbness because SAIF can't prove what is wrong with me.

Educational Assistant

Hermiston School Dist.

Dear Lawmakers,

I have a story to tell about being harmed by students at my middle school. I was working supervision during lunch when a student crept up behind me on hands and knees and encircled my legs with his arms at the level of my knees. This caused me to fall backwards on top of the student. As a result, I have had an ongoing lower back and sacro-iliac joint problem for which I am in treatment. (The sacro-iliac joint is formed by a connection between the sacrum of the back and the iliac region of the pelvis.)

I was able to buffer the fall by putting my palms down behind me, which caused me to fall on my hands, resulting in sore muscles in the frontal deltoid muscles of my shoulders. If I had fallen in such a way that my hip hit the ground first, the result would have been a 911 call, as I would not have been able to get up because of the pain involved. There might have been a risk of further orthopedic injury to the sacro-iliac joint.

There is some doubt of the boy's intention that caused me to fall down. In discussing it one of the boys involved (one of the darers), said that the group had dared the boy who caused me to fall down to hug me, as opposed of doing some maneuver that would intentionally cause me to fall down. As of today I am inclined to believe that the dare was a hug, and that the boys did not know or expect that I would fall down.

I hope this information will help you understand that accidents occur all the time and are not always done with malice.

I prefer that my name or a pseudonym be used, if that is allowed.

Regards,

Ashland School District

Classroom Assistant

Dear Lawmakers,

I get up at 5 a.m every morning, start my morning with coffee. I read and pray for the day. I wake up my boys and we get ready for school and work. I arrive at school trying to be strong and not emotional. I am wondering what the new day will bring. Having to worry about being hurt by a student or attacked is stressful. It has taken a toll on my family. The worst is having nightmares about being attacked. I've been shoved, bitten, chased, attacked and scratched on my face and arms. Others come to me and say they are afraid of my students. I try to protect teachers, kids, and even pets. If something happens I feel guilty.

As a para-professional I have duties associated with providing medical attention and mediation. Working with students I regularly change underclothing; administer medication; secure a sanitary environment; clean vomit and excrement. As a mediator or guard for others I protect other students (disabled or smaller), teachers, and staff from being attacked by students; protect animals from attacks; and pull students off of other staff being attacked. I try to make parents, teachers and students happy.

I care about my students, but I also need a break sometimes. When I have to leave students in the hands of my co-workers and I am worried the whole time I am gone for their safety. Please, we need you to support HB 3045 and to act as soon as possible. We love these children. They have a right to an education and we have the right to be safe. I invite you to come and visit any time, any day and share our experience with these very special children. Thank you.

Para-Professional

Baker School District

Hello Lawmakers,

I am still dealing with pain and issues from the result of the attack on Sept 17, 2012. I was forced by SAIF to get an attorney in this matter. After seeing several doctors and going through a variety of exams, I have been informed my case has been "accepted" by SAIF. I was told I have to see yet another doctor (my 6th), who I will see this week, and as of this date, I have still not been reimbursed for my gas for visiting doctors, or for my prescriptions that I had to purchase.

I had witnesses to my attack, I had been hit several times, one of them is what has caused some sort of nerve damage in my right forearm. This is a problem for a right handed person, I can't even hold my new grandson comfortably. All I want is my arm back the way it was and that I don't have to worry about my safety while working with students. I have worked in this district in Special Ed since August 2004 and have had a variety of trainings to work with special needs children. This student has hit other staff members as well. By the way, the student who attacked me had been repeatedly restrained on and off as needed by a professional in the room he took off into. When it appeared he was calming down, he came at me while I was guarding the door to keep him from running down the halls and out the door into the parking lot. This student had run outside before, previously to this incident, I had been put into a position of leaving almost the entire 1st grade alone for a couple of minutes at lunch recess, so I could "herd" this child back to the playground. It is very upsetting to make a choice like that. When I did get back to my spot on the playground, in that short time, a student had fallen and had scraped his knee.

Let me know if you need any more info relating to my incident. I'm not sure if what I've given you is enough, but hopefully. I've got some concerns with our current system. Also, just this last Friday, at recess a first grader slapped my hand while I was trying to question her about another students claim she had hit her. I was just trying to get her side of the story, she screamed and was crying and then slapped me before I could even ask her anything. I had to write her up for slapping me. It's become strongly evident to me that our kids, over the years I have worked here, are getting much more aggressive to not only to other students which is bad enough, but alarmingly to adult staff as well.

Thank you,

Special Education Assistant

Sunset School District