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Honorable Chair and Committee members:

I am Tamra Busch-Johnsen representing the BEC which is a state-wide, non-profit organization invested in quality education since 1984. Our services connect students with their future and give teachers professional tools to create enthusiastic and skilled, lifelong learners.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about a subject that is changing education in Oregon and the nation. In our brief time together, I'll present what proficiency is, its status in schools; how we know it works and will close with some recommendations. I also have Rebecca Steinke with me today. She is a teacher in the West-Linn Wilsonville School District who will speak from the perspective of a teacher and BEC proficiency coach.

From here on—I'll simply use the word proficiency to refer to proficiency-based teaching and learning.

In classrooms across Oregon, proficiency is producing unprecedented levels of student achievement. The early results were so impressive that the Oregon Education Roundtable in 2009 published a white paper, concluding that proficiency was the one practice if taken to scale statewide, could do the most at the least cost to transform student achievement. Well, time has proven they were right.

What is proficiency? How does a proficiency classroom differ from a traditional classroom?

First, a clarification is in order. You are familiar with the term "Credit by Proficiency" which pertains to high school. Today proficiency practice encompasses the entire K-12 system.

Definition. "Sufficient evidence of student-demonstrated knowledge and skills that meet or exceed defined levels of performance." A student who is proficient must demonstrate all of the knowledge and skills in a given standard.

Comparisons

- ▶ **Traditional classroom:** the standards are not always transparent.

In a proficiency classroom, learning targets are based on state and national standards, **explicitly** shared and understood by every student.

- ▶ **Traditional classroom.** Besides assessment testing, many times grading includes points for attitude, behavior, extra credit, homework and attendance.

In a proficiency classroom, students are graded and advanced solely on demonstrated mastery in the standards. Grades reflect only what the student knows and can do—a solid predictor of post-secondary success.

- ▶ **Traditional classroom.** Most teachers deliver large group instruction in the classroom, using the textbook as the primary source of learning.

In a proficiency classroom, instruction is flexible, individualized, often interdisciplinary and frequently project-based. It may take place in or beyond the classroom. Learning outcomes emphasize higher order thinking skills and the application of knowledge.

- ▶ **Traditional classroom.** The challenge for today's educators is the mandate of time. The pressure is always to move on to the next chapter, the end of semester test or the next grade, even if students haven't mastered the material.

In a proficiency classroom, learning is the constant and time is the variable. Students have as much time as they need to learn and demonstrate the required concepts. Interventions prevent student failure.

Now let's look at a different type of comparison between traditional and proficiency classrooms.

Proficiency model—*Equity-based*

- ▶ Student learning is highly personalized—in a sense each student has an individualized educational plan
- ▶ Students who struggle and slip behind receive high quality interventions with teachers and support specialists
- ▶ Students who quickly reach mastery are challenged to take on more advanced learning—either under the guidance of that same teacher, or moving to a higher level class

Bottom line—the students who need help get it, and those who don't move on. AND proficiency closes the gap with underserved student populations.

What is the status of proficiency in Oregon schools today?

BEC has been leading this grassroots movement for the past eight years. And it is clearly gaining momentum! In 2005—our first year of training classes, BEC instructed 72 teachers. In the last two years, more than 2,000 educators attended our trainings! To date, BEC has hosted 4,500 educators in our various trainings. They represent 127 of our 197 school districts across most counties.

There are many reasons for proficiency's momentum, but let me highlight just a few.

1. **Many teachers enthusiastically support it.** They are the ones driving the change. Because of the results, it re-engages them in their profession. And they are emphatic in saying that they will never go back to the old methods of instruction.
2. **Proficiency is a top priority for many administrators.** Administrators are observing higher student achievement where it's implemented—especially for underserved youth.
3. **It works.** Data supports the significant improvement in student achievement as I'll discuss in a moment.
4. **House Bill 2220.** It requires districts to clearly show parents their students' academic progress in content standards. The new reporting will reflect academic proficiency separate from behavioral performance. School leaders recognize that proficiency practices are key to meet HB 2220 requirements. And, it is consistent with the direction other states are taking to separate academic marks from behavior-related factors.

As the leader of this state-wide initiative, and supported by our partners, Oregon Education Association and COSA, BEC efforts have been focused on developing technical skills and defining the standards of practice:

- ▶ Professional development. Includes the basics (Proficiency 101), the practical application to classrooms with subject-matter teacher coaching experts, and customized trainings to meet the specific needs of teachers (e.g. assessments, grading/ grade reporting, parent communications, intervention models).
- ▶ Consultation with administrators and school board members. Addresses the challenge of systemic implementation, especially grade reporting through HB 2220.
- ▶ BEC wrote the book on proficiency. One of the biggest challenges to implementing a proficiency model is the development of a common definition of essential elements and fidelity in the practice. Without an accepted definition and understanding of those elements, many teachers were calling their teaching and learning activities “proficiency” when in fact proficiency disciplines were only partially present, if at all.

The Department of Education expressed their concern and looked to the BEC’s expertise and leadership to develop those standards. The results of that effort was the publication of *It’s About Time—A Framework for Proficiency-based Teaching and Learning*. Besides clearly defining the mandatory elements of proficiency it is a practical guide for successful classroom implementation of proficiency practices.

There is nothing like it in the country. It has received the attention of national experts who have been longing for such a resource. It is now an integral tool in all BEC trainings on proficiency, is used by school leaders in training their teachers, as well as by teachers and departments to self-evaluate their progress in using proficiency strategies in their classrooms

Each of you will receive a copy.

Where is the evidence that proficiency raises student achievement?

There are numerous indicators that tell us proficiency works.

- ▶ Independent evaluator data. A research pilot was conducted with 16 schools across 4 districts in the 2010-11 school year. It was a mix of schools already established in proficiency practice plus emerging schools. Even with many emerging schools implementing for only a partial year, results were impressive:
 - OAKS math scores increased 17%
 - OAKS reading and literature increased 11%
 - Attendance improved in **all** schools
- ▶ Direct teacher evidence.
 - Scores of teachers talk to us—write to us—share their moving stories of student ownership of their learning—their increased levels of effort—their improved outcomes—and their pride in those outcomes
 - Hundreds of teachers respond to surveys saying that proficiency practices increase academic achievement—nearly 80% according to our last survey
- ▶ State assessments for schools implementing proficiency. Beyond the expected initial surge in student achievement, standardized test scores continue to rise as observed in year-over-year tracking.

I can assure you (from our own experience and that of other states) that if proficiency with its essential elements is implemented for EVERY student in EVERY classroom in EVERY subject, you can count on the following:

- ▶ A high school diploma that is a reliable predictor of post-secondary success
- ▶ A higher percentage of students will graduate, college and career ready
- ▶ The Governor's vision of 40-40-20 has a chance to be realized by 2025

Where do we go from here?

We know that you have many difficult funding decisions coming before you. As you consider those legislative actions, please keep in mind these two criteria as part of your decision yardstick:

1. Will this bill DIRECTLY and QUICKLY raise student achievement?
2. Will the initiative being funded meet its objectives AND thrive when monies goes away?

Now, let's recap why proficiency is so critical to Oregon, and how your actions can move the dial on results in the short term.

We all agree that Oregon kids MUST graduate from high school ready for post-secondary education, work and life.

- ▶ Proficiency will help raise our 68% graduation rate and support achievement of the Governor's vision for 40-40-20.
- ▶ Teachers have learned from research and other proficiency teachers that their classrooms need to change. They want to learn how!
- ▶ A **radical** change is needed. Proficiency is that radical change
 - It's embraced by teachers
 - It is a root-cause solution to the problem. Why continue investing in programs/ initiatives that don't solve the problem at its core?
 - With proficiency, no student moves on until they are proficient in EVERY learning target. It's the only way to ensure a diploma that is a predictor of success.
 - Among other things, it means more students excelling in science and math. It feeds the STEM pipeline so critical to Oregon's economy.

Proficiency requires some investment, but the investments are DOABLE. We estimate that for \$1,000 per teacher—or \$13.5 million per biennium—proficiency could be fully scaled across Oregon's K-12 system in four years.

You should know that to date, all efforts to transform Oregon K-12 education with proficiency have been done without State-level targeted funding. But scaling is not possible without that level of funding.

As you know, resources are spread very thin. Class sizes are huge! Districts are stretched to their maximum trying to address their many unfunded mandates (e.g. achievement compacts, SB 290/ teacher evaluations, common core state standards). The irony is that proficiency would support the achievement of those mandates.

Why would we NOT make such a minimal investment for optimal results?

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