Testimony on HB 2636 to House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee

Lita Colligan :: February 25, 2013

Good Morning, Chair Dembrow, Vice Chairs Harker and Huffman, and members of the committee.

My name is Lita Colligan. I am Associate Vice President for Strategic Partnerships at Oregon Institute of Technology, Oregon Tech, Oregon's public, polytechnic, STEM university. I am also one of the conveners of the South Metro-Salem STEM Partnership.

I am here today to thank you for putting a focus on STEM education, and for inviting me to make a few comments about House Bill 2636. As a university administrator, a facilitator of a regional STEM partnership, and as someone who has committed her career to workforce development and applied education, I am convinced that hands-on, experiential learning is what ignites the passion of learners of all ages, and leads to higher achievement in school and to the selection of STEM courses, majors and careers. HB2636 has the potential to ignite that passion for students throughout Oregon.

As the "partnership person" at Oregon Tech, I cannot speak for all the universities or colleges in Oregon, but I am aware that every campus is working feverishly to build the bridges and make the transitions for students so we can shift from remediation to student-driven motivation, excitement, and college and career readiness. Students today want to solve the world's big challenges, and we can help them do so by providing both academic and experiential knowledge and skills in STEM. This bill will provide essential leadership and resources to make that happen.

As some of you are aware, Deb Mumm-Hill from FIRST and I have facilitated the formation of the South Metro-Salem STEM Partnership, a coalition of 13 school districts (from West Linn-Wilsonville to Woodburn to Salem-Keizer to McMinnville), three community colleges (Chemeketa, Clackamas, PCC Newberg), WOU and Pacific University, six community organizations including FIRST Robotics, Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum, and Business Education Compact, and over 15 business partners, including Intel, Mentor Graphics, Legacy, and Garmin. Modeled after the work of my distinguished colleague from PSU, Bill Becker, our goal is to catalyze Oregon students to achieve degrees and certificates in STEM fields.

Together we are focused on doubling the number of STEM college graduates that matriculate from partner schools, and increasing the participation of under-represented students in STEM.

On behalf of Oregon Tech and the South Metro-Salem STEM Partnership, I ask the committee to consider three issues in your deliberations on this bill.

1. **Collaboration and leverage are essential.** The STEM partnerships or hubs are all about leverage and collaboration. Oregon will get more for its money, if the grants awarded from the STEM Investment Account are connected to a regional strategy or part of a partnership. We will reach more students and teachers, and take advantage of the rich resources in our communities. Right now there are STEM partnerships in the metro area, South Metro-Salem, on the coast with Oregon State, in the Gorge with CGCC and the Gorge Technology Alliance, through EOU and the Eastern Promise, and many other places. If grants are connected to a collective vision – to something bigger-- we will have more people pulling in a common direction and get more leverage.

2. **It matters where the money comes from.** We discussed HB2636 at a recent STEM Partnership meeting and our K12 school districts expressed concern that if the STEM dollars subtract from other programs or services, we may not get the net results we are seeking.

3. **We don't need to reinvent the wheel**. Oregon will achieve a more immediate and lasting impact if we invest in evidence-based, effective practices. Schools and partnerships must identify what's working in their regions, or in the state or nation, and take effective practices to scale, rather than starting up scattered, pilot programs. FIRST and Project Lead The Way are good examples of nationally-recognized, effective STEM programs that can be implemented by local schools immediately, and there are impressive local models that could be expanded within regions as well.

   For example, six years ago there were 15 high school FIRST Robotics teams in Oregon and this year there is over 130 high school teams. These students grow up and matriculate into our university system. There are now seven robotics professors at OSU that have been hired in the past three years as the student demand drove the development of their Robotics department.

   Please ensure that STEM grants proliferate proven practices, and we don't start from scratch.

   I hope that the STEM Council and the STEM Investment Account described in this bill will have a huge impact on student achievement, yet I believe that an even bigger game changer will be when the Achievement Compacts for every school, college and university measure not just degrees, but degrees in STEM or other high-demand fields.

   I urge you to support HB 2636 so we can close the gap between the available high-wage jobs in Oregon and the skills of Oregon's graduates.

Thank you for considering my suggestions as you craft the final version of the bill.