



**DATE: February 20, 2015**

**TO: Chair Doherty and Members of the House Education Committee**

**FROM: Iris Maria Chavez, Government Affairs Director, Stand for Children Oregon**

**RE: House Bill 2657**

Oregon has, over the last several years, affirmed a commitment to ensuring all Oregon students have access to a high quality, safe education. Oregon has shown this commitment by:

1. improving the culture of schools through reforms to school discipline practices,
2. by increasing access to effective educators through initiatives like the Network for Quality Teaching & Learning,
3. and recent efforts to ensure students are on track for success through a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading initiative.

All of these are laudable, and are efforts that Stand for Children members care deeply about.

However, none of these efforts can help our students be successful if they are not in school to access them. Oregon has one of the nation's worst chronic absenteeism problems. Nationally, about 1 in 10 kindergarteners are chronically absent, in Oregon 1 in 4 kindergarteners are. Oregon is ranked as the 4th worst in school attendance for 4th and 8th graders.

Absenteeism, whether chronic or not, has big implications for a student's success throughout their academic life. Researchers, when looking at Oregon specifically, found that absences starting in kindergarten predicted poor attendance and lower achievement in the years ahead. Of particular concern is that children chronically absent in both early grades (kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade) have the poorest reading achievement levels by the time they are in fifth grade.

Despite the unpopularity of the Achievement Compacts, Oregon did begin to move in the right direction in 2012, when the Oregon Department of Education worked with then Governor Kitzhaber's office to add a measure of chronic absence in sixth grade to these. In order to have an increasing impact across the state, however, policies and efforts around attendance need to begin earlier and leverage what we know works.

To continue to address this issue, Rep. Komp has worked with advocates to craft House Bill 2657.

This bill proposes a shift in the state school formula from an enrollment based measure to an attendance based measure, commonly referred to as Average Daily Attendance (ADA). The bill

would direct the State Board of Education to not consider days a pupil is absent when determining aggregate days membership. Doing so would explicitly encourage schools to emphasize attendance where the current fiscal system does not. The bill, as amended, does ensure that excused absences, such as those for illness or observation of religious holidays are counted as “attended” for the purpose of calculating aggregate days membership.

A number of states have turned to ADA as a basis for funding, including California, Kentucky, Idaho, Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. Of these states, all but Idaho, now have absenteeism rates at or below the national average for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

HB 26 57 does recognize that schools and districts will need a period of time to determine strategies for combatting absenteeism, so puts in place a phased in implementation period, with full implementation by school year 2020. A start year of 2016-17, with the incoming kindergarten class, will coincide with the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of full day kindergarten implementation and a class known for having the highest average chronic absenteeism rate in the state.

We recognize that this is one part of a solution to the challenge of absenteeism in Oregon. Increased access to better longitudinal data and the identification/replication of already successful strategies will be an essential element to combatting this problem. Stand for Children is committed to working on all aspects of absenteeism in Oregon and feel strongly that HB 2657 is the right place to start.

Again, absenteeism, whether chronic or not, has big implications for a student’s success throughout their academic life and even our best efforts, as educators, advocates and lawmakers, cannot help our students be successful if they are not in school to access them.