



February 20, 2015

To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Kelly P. Beard, Principal- May Street Elementary School
Re: Testimony in favor of SB321

In February of 2014 the Oregonian ran a series of articles entitled "Empty Desks", exposing the horrendous absenteeism rate of Oregon public schools. At that time, it was reported that nearly 100,000 Oregon students miss more than 3 ½ weeks (or 10%) of the school year.

The articles described the detrimental impact that high absenteeism and truancy have on students. These impacts include, but are not limited to, significantly lower literacy rates for students missing more than 20% of their first grade year and drawing the correlation between absenteeism and Oregon's high drop-out rate.

While the premise of the article was to point out the disastrous impact on student performance and failure to thrive in school, and to suggest methods for school personnel to improve attendance rates, one overlooked consequence was the profound economic cost to the taxpayer.

Here at May Street Elementary School, 26.5% of first grade students in 2012-13 missed more than 10% of the school year due to absenteeism. The annual cost per student at May Street in that year was \$5,600. Based upon those figures, taxpayers shelled out in excess of \$13,600, paying for first grade students that were not present.

This coming school year, Oregon public schools will be expanding to offer full day kindergarten across the state. Expanding the educational opportunity for our youngest learners is essential. Steps must also be taken to protect our investment.

Using data from the Oregon Department of Education, we can estimate the economic impact of chronic absenteeism. In 2012-13, the reported actual operating expenditure per student was \$9364. Enrollment of kindergarten and first grade students was 83,397. The

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number of kindergarten and first grade students that missed 17 or more days that year was 12,509.

Each of those students cost their respective schools over \$900 per year and the combined total cost to the state was over \$11.3 million.

By clearly and definitively lowering the compulsory education age to 5 years old, SB321 places greater leverage in the hands of educators. Teachers, counselors, secretaries, administrators... in fact *all* public school employees, want our kids in school. As educators, we will continue to use a combination of encouragement and pressure to ensure that parents and students know the importance of consistent attendance. As legislators, providing educators with every tool available and protecting taxpayer investment is your responsibility. Vote in favor of SB321.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly P. Beard". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Kelly P. Beard
Principal
May Street Elementary School
Hood River County School District

Hammond , B. (2014) Empty Desks: A special report on Oregon school absenteeism. *Oregon Live*. Retrieved from http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2014/02/empty_desks_special_report_gui.html

Actual Operating vs Capital Expenditures per Student
Oregon Department of Education
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/sfda/reports/r0051Select2.asp>

State Level Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism Rates (2013-14)
Oregon Department of Education
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=471>

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