

March 1, 2015

Dear Chair Roblan and Senate Committee on Education Members,

I am writing to encourage the passage of SB 321 to lower Oregon's compulsory school age from 7 to five years of age. As an educator for thirty-five years; primary teacher, elementary principal, and current supervisor of principals, I am compelled to support this change as we begin to focus on the critical years of formative learning for our children.

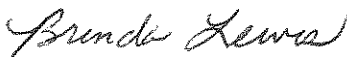
Oregon is moving forward with a focus on early learning by providing resources for statewide full day kindergarten (SB 44 legislation, passed in 2011), as well as for early learning support for prenatal through age 6 children through our regional Early Learning Hubs. These hubs are to ensure that all children from birth through six years of age and their families are stable, healthy, and prepared for kindergarten and educational success. Early intervention in these areas will provide a safety net prior to kindergarten entry. In addition, Oregon legislation provides that truancy laws take affect upon school enrollment, beginning in kindergarten at age 5. This legislation was passed with the knowledge and understanding that early literacy education and school attendance is critical, especially for children of poverty. Our current compulsory law assumes that as late as age 7, children can begin to attend school and be ready to learn.

We know, through experience and research data, regular school attendance habits begin in kindergarten, and have a significant impact on success in school as well as high school graduation. Our kindergarten teachers are prepared to provide high quality early literacy instruction that engages the students as well their parents as partners in learning. Early literacy is a predictor of high school graduation and college attendance. Students who do not learn to read by the end of third grade are more likely to be retained, drop out and/or end up incarcerated as young adults.

In my many years of experience working with primary students, I have seen the unfortunate impact on children whose parents enrolled them at the age of 7 or later, or parents who did not provide for a consistent, daily school experience for their child. Many of these children missed early opportunities for intervention, struggled and faced a future of abbreviated schooling as well as difficulty with interpersonal relationships and success at finding work out of school.

I respectfully ask that you please support SB 321, sending a consistent message as to our belief that early childhood education is critical for Oregon's children.

Sincerely,



Brenda Lewis
Executive Administrator for K-8 Schools

District Goal for 2010-2015: All students will show continuous progress toward their personal learning goals, developed in collaboration with teachers and parents, and will be prepared for post-secondary education and career success.

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