
Senate Committee on Education
Sen. Arnie Roblan, Chair
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE,
Salem, Oregon 97301

April 7, 2015

Chair Roblan and Committee Members,

Good Afternoon, my name is John Nelsen. I am a life-long Oregonian currently residing in Fairview. I attended Portland Public Schools, Mt. Hood Community College and Portland State University where I earned a Master's degree in education.

My community service includes ten years on the Reynolds School Board (including five years in leadership). Additionally, I co-founded and served five years as Board Chair of the Arthur Academy and served on the boards of both Multi-Sensory Learning Academy (MLA) and ACE Academy (Architecture, Construction and Engineering). -All public charter schools-

Professionally, I worked twelve years administrating regional school improvement grants at the Columbia Education Center and seven years directing federally funded Gear-Up and Student Support Services programs at PCC/Cascade. Additionally, I was retained by the IBEW to design and implement an initiative that dramatically increased the number of women and minority candidates applying for admission into union apprenticeship training programs. While these professional settings may seem diverse, ALL of my work has revolved around educational equity.

I am currently a member of the Leadership Team at KNOVA Learning. KNOVA is a 420-student minority-majority public charter school serving East Multnomah County's troubled Rockwood community.

I am here today to speak in support of SB 819. My advocacy for this bill stems from my personal and professional commitment to equity and improved performance in public schools.

Some opponents of this legislation will say their district will take a budgetary hit of "X" amount if this bill passes, when in reality they are currently profiting by "X" on the backs of kids in charter schools - and have been doing so for 15 years. It's a great deal for them; as much as 42% revenue for kids they don't educate! Balancing their budgets on the backs of kids, in many cases, vulnerable kids (like many at KNOVA) who might wash out altogether. Now, I don't want to perpetuate any adversarial relationship - ALL public schools need more money, the base needs to be higher. BUT, the FACT is that kids in charter schools are the only ones currently below the base that everyone else has.

Now I could burn my four minutes here railing on how dubious lobbying forces sought to cripple Oregon's fledgling charter school legislation at its inception but you all know the history and I would rather share a positive vision of what equitable funding would mean for our school today.

As you know, charter schools can't seek capital bonds for facilities. We don't receive any Title funds or other federal support for our programming; KNOVA survives on 80% of ADM (un-weighted). **This inequitable funding ensures huge gaps in the services and resources we can provide our students relative to traditional public schools.**

Instructional technology is a great example of how the funding inequity affects KNOVA. In today's world students increasingly need access to computers, I-pads, etc.. In our sponsoring district (Reynolds) the student-to-device ratio is 2to1. At KNOVA it is 14to1! Passing SB 819 would help **close this technology gap.**

Great schools always begin with great teachers. At KNOVA teachers make approximately 78% of the beginning salary enjoyed by their Reynolds counterparts. In addition, we are unable to match the "step & column" salary increases and generous benefits packages offered by the district. The result is an inability to recruit and retain seasoned teachers. Last year KNOVA had to replace 24 of 30 teachers. Passing SB 819 would help our school **close the gap in instructional experience!**

KNOVA is housed in an old furniture store that we've retrofitted to meet our minimum needs! Our kids do without such basics as a gym, playground, library, media lab, cafeteria or auditorium. Passage of SB 819 would allow us to **improve our current facility** and/or secure more appropriate facilities for our students and families.

All this said, KNOVA's morale is high! Our parents are enthusiastic and our students are achieving academically on par or better than students in our neighborhood's traditional schools! Imagine the gains our students would make if their education was funded equitably!

Please support and encourage passage of SB 819!

Thank you for your time,

John W. Nelsen
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