

TO: Education Committee, Oregon Senate
FROM: Caroline Fenn, Portland, Oregon
SUBJECT: Public testimony on SB 957
DATE: April 13, 2015

My name is Caroline Fenn. I am a parent of three former Portland Public Schools students, an activist and education advocate and a member of the Parents Coalition.

SB 957 Section 1 proposes to limit the Oregon State Board of Education's rule making authority significantly and to nullify an administrative rule change approved by the board in January that would ensure that more Oregon students receive the full instructional hours to which they are legally entitled than is currently the case in a number of school districts. Specifically, the proposed amendment states that state standards for instructional time may not be increased nor actually required for any percentage of public school students in a school district unless the quality education model is funded at a minimum of 83%.

Under the guise of supporting an increase in school funding, this proposed bill actually limits the ability of the state and its representatives to protect the rights of children. I urge the Senate Education Committee to remove SB 957 from consideration.

As you know, Oregon school districts have struggled mightily to maintain operations through years of economic uncertainty and budget cuts. Unfortunately for students, one option that has been available to every district is to cut school days or hours in the day, and many districts have taken this approach to balancing budgets. It is not a step school boards and district leaders want to take, but it is too often the choice that is made. As a result, a generation of Oregon public school students have experienced shortened school days and years, along with crowded classrooms, throughout their K-12 years. As a result, a generation of Oregon public school students has received far less schooling overall than students in other states and is inadequately prepared for post-high school success. SB 957 would keep the option of closing schools early firmly on the table. It is an option that needs to be removed.

The Oregon Department of Education and State Board of Education are responsible for ensuring that state funds are used as intended. The intended use of general fund dollars in the form of the per-pupil allocation is to educate students. The ability of both bodies to ensure that students receive the education to which they are legally entitled should not be curtailed nor tied to a minimal level of school funding. All that will accomplish is to limit the avenues available to students and families to exercise their rights.

I am one of the parents who filed a complaint with ODE regarding the practice in Portland Public Schools of limiting high school students' access to a full day of classes and a full school year of course study. Had ODE not been able to order PPS to comply with state requirements, PPS high school students would still be in classes that didn't meet for enough hours to earn a high school credit, would still be limited by district policy to taking no more than 6 or 7 out of 8 possible periods of classes depending on their year, and would not have a functional complaint procedure. As it is, ODE was not able to find PPS out of compliance with the minimum instructional hours requirement because their schedule showed 990 hours worth of classes available to students. The fact that the majority of students are not enrolled for 990 hours was irrelevant. This is a situation that has persisted and that should begin to be remedied next school year via the recent changes to OAR 581-022-1620, which SB 957 seeks to negate.

This spring only 47% of PPS high school students are enrolled in a full day of classes. Attached is a document prepared by PPS for ODE documenting high school student enrollment by period, by class year, by school as of March 15, 2015. **District-wide only 47% of PPS high school students are enrolled for 990 instructional hours**, yet PPS receives state funds as though the vast majority of high school students were enrolled for 990 hours. Where is that money going?

The administrative rule change approved by the State Board of Education in January 2015, a rule change that SB 957 seeks to roll back, would require districts to demonstrate that an increasing percentage of students over the next several years are in fact enrolled for the minimum required instructional hours. It would end the practice of districts receiving school funds to educate students and reallocating those funds for other purposes, while cutting back on school days or students' access to classes. This is a rule change that is clearly in the best interests of students and that ensures that state funds are used as intended. It represents much needed progress.

Thank you for your consideration. Please put students first and prevent SB 957 from holding students' needs and rights hostage to a funding debate.