



Date: April 14, 2015
To: Senate Education Committee, Chair Roblan and Members
From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations
RE: SB 957 [*Pausing the new Instructional Hours Rules*]

On January 22, 2015, the State Board of Education adopted a new set of school year requirements for Oregon’s school children. These new expectations, while based on a shared value for maximizing educational time for student, did not come with the resources to pay for the lengthened day or restrictions on what could “count” toward the minimum required hours. For that reason, the education community opposed the adoption of these new rules, to no avail.

Here is a piece of our testimony when these rules were under consideration:

“In our three advisory meetings prior to the submission of the formal proposed rule changes, we raised many questions about consequences, intended or unintended, of making such changes, particularly in an environment in which our schools continue to be underfunded. Among the various impacts we saw were:

- A likely dramatic increase in class sizes (we’re already second in the nation in high class sizes);
- Worrisome impacts to the delivery of special education services;
- Impacts to the time districts have made for collaboration, planning, professional development, and other collegial interaction (such as professional learning community contact time);
- Implications for low-income students whose work schedules literally help keep their families fed and housed;
- Particular challenges in meeting the new requirements for districts with four-day weeks or trimester schedules;
- Greater impacts on small, rural, and poorer school districts with less flexibility;
- Urgency to meet new, more expensive requirements could drive districts to cut costs in a way that may not optimize student learning. More virtual classes, less teacher planning time, reduction in off-campus learning activities such as internships are some likely casualties of these proposals.

“While clearly these are well-intentioned proposals, they are being issued without adequate data to fully elucidate for the Board what the current conditions are and how, **without resources to fund the changes**, rulemaking will impact our students. Some districts estimate that these changes will, in effect, add the costs of between five and ten school days to their schedules. The K-3 hour boost would add 15 six-hour school days – three weeks – to the elementary school minimum. Without new resources to pay for these added costs, districts will be forced to make changes elsewhere in their programs such as those described in likely impacts, detailed above.” [November 2014]

We have shared the text of the State Board rules with this committee.

In the aftermath of the State Board of Education vote on three related rule changes concerning instructional hours and seat time requirements for Oregon’s public schools, OEA worked with legislators to craft legislation that might fix two problems that this issue raises: one, the unaccountable policy power that should rightfully remain with the Legislature (HB 3493 is being considered on the House side), and two, the mandate that will be imposed on districts without the resources to fully comply without taking from other valuable student services (SB 957).

While we expect that policymakers would agree with the goal of providing more learning time for students, we believe that you also realize that the quality of class time will erode if the school year is lengthened but class sizes swell, staff is laid off, and programs are cut.

That is why we are grateful that the Senate Education Committee has produced SB 957, which ties the implementation of the expensive rules to the funding levels it would take for all districts to afford to comply.

Research has shown that a variety of educational elements conspire to produce successful, well-rounded, educated students. These include professional preparation and supports for educators, time on task and personal attention for students, and enrichments that make lessons come alive for our students – such as field trips, internships, small group projects, and the like. For some students, the rigid rules collide with schedules that include such enrichments. For other students, whose families experience poverty, a part-time job vies with educational priorities in a way these rules fail to accommodate.

We ask this committee to support SB 957 so that the rules are delayed until the level of school funding is sufficient to add hours and days in places that cannot schedule beyond the previously mandated minimum without serious consequences – especially to class size, enrichments, and personal attention for students.

Thank you so much for your support.