



TO: Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Education Committee

FROM: Toya Johnson Fick, Executive Director, Stand for Children Oregon

DATE: April 16, 2015

RE: Senate Bill 957

On behalf of Stand for Children (Stand) members across Oregon, I write in opposition to SB 957.

Time in school is a precious resource and needs to be carefully guarded. As currently written, SB 957 would erode away what little time our students spend in the classroom and would undermine rules put in place by the Oregon State Board of Education in January. We firmly believe these new rules will go a long way to ensuring more Oregon students receive instructional time that is more competitive with the rest of the country.

Before I outline why we believe this legislation would be harmful to students across this state, I would like to address comments made during the first hearing on this bill (Tuesday, April 14, 2015). The sentiment from one of the panelist was that increasing instructional time for low-income students would cause harm to the economic well-being of the families of these students and, therefore, the state should not provide these students with a full schedule.

I am completely offended by those remarks and challenge the premise – providing more education to a low-income student is in no way harmful to any student, particularly low-income students. I contend that the opposite is true. I will use my own story as evidence:

I was raised by a single mom. As the oldest of her three children, I assumed the role of the second parent for my younger siblings.

On the morning of my 16th birthday, I skipped school for the first (and last) time to apply for a job. I was paid \$6.10 an hour (the minimum wage of my state at the time, I believe) and worked 35 hours a week because it was the only way to help my family have enough money to “make ends meet.”

In addition to working a full-time job starting at 16, I took a full schedule of challenging courses (including nearly AP course my high school had to offer) because it was the only way to ensure I was prepared for college and could go on to having a job that paid more than the minimum wage. My future was directly tied to the courses I took in high school.

My story is not unique. Passing SB 957 would ensure that it is from this point forward.

Under SB 957, districts would not be required to provide the minimum number of instructional hours (as set by state rules) or schedule students for that minimum if the state does not appropriate at least 83 percent of the funding called for by the Quality Education Model (QEM). By doing so, this legislation implies that funding – and funding alone – is the only factor in determining the length of the school year for

students across our state. One simple data point dispels this theory: Oregon ranks 34th in the nation in per-pupil spending but second from the bottom for length of school year.

We believe this legislation would be harmful to students across our state and is completely unnecessary for many reasons.

First, many districts are able to meet the minimum instructional time as required by state rules with current funding. Data from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) found that 150 districts reported offering 932-1049 hours of instructional time for grades 9-12. It is worth noting that they are able to do so with current funding level.

Further, many districts that were not scheduling students for the minimum number of hours have moved to do so in recent years and they have done so without receiving 83 percent of the QEM from the state. One has to look no further than the Eugene/4J school district for evidence:

In the 2011-2012 school year, only 32.6 percent of FRESHMAN received a full schedule, meaning that these students without a full schedule would not be on track to graduate with their class. Upon this coming to light, by the very next school year the district had hired additional teachers at all comprehensive high schools so that all freshman were fully scheduled in 2012-13. Districtwide, only 33 percent of all 4J high school students had full schedules in the 2011-2012 school year. In one trimester of the following school year, 73 percent did.

This dramatic turn around all occurred within the 2011-2013 biennium – without reaching 83 percent of the QEM between the two school years. We would like to thank the district leadership in Eugene for taking steps to increase instructional time for kids in that district.

If you will indulge me, I would like to take the time to share the perspective of some of our members. In a survey of Stand members, many expressed concerns that schools were encouraging students to take a less than full schedule. A sample of their comments can be found below:

- “[My child] does not have a full schedule. Could not get any desired classes that would help with aspiration for college.” (Member, Eugene)
- “It is very important for us as parents that our children are as long as possible in the classroom; those hours of instruction our children receive is the key to their academic development. Academic standards today are higher and tighter therefore instructional time should be longer and more meaningful.” (Member, Reynolds)
- “I’ve seen students encouraged to take less than a full schedule because they “can” without understanding how a light schedule will affect their chances of getting into and being prepared for college. This particularly impacts children from under resourced communities whose parents might not know the implications of a lighter schedule.” (Member, Salem)
- “The first year my daughter was in HS, the superintendent made it a priority to ensure that all first-year HS students had a full schedule. It didn’t continue in subsequent years. How can kids not have access to the courses they need to graduate?” (Member, Eugene)
- “As my daughter entered high school, I am shocked by the opportunities to miss school time. These are not structured study times, but free periods with no supervision. No wonder her high school is good but has a 29% drop out rate. How is this acceptable?” (Member, Eugene)

- "My eldest is a freshman. During forecasting he was emphatically encourage to take a study hall. He had to OPT OUT of study hall. He had to sign a statement that taking a full load of classes would be challenging. It was surreal." (Member, Portland)

Our members who are teachers tell us they cannot get through a college and career prep curriculum in such a short year. With nearly 40 percent of Oregon students at 2-year colleges and 13 percent who enter a 4-year college requiring remediation, they have evidence to support that statement. The combination of a short school year and under-scheduling of high school students will not lead to better outcomes for our kids.

We must address each of these issues to give our students the world-class K-12 education they need and deserve. We do not accept tight budgets as an excuse for giving students an even shorter school year.

We urge you to vote NO on SB 957.

Thank you for your consideration.