

TO: Chair Doherty, House Education Committee
FROM: Cassandra Thonstad, Newberg High School
RE: SB 83
DATE: May 8, 2015

My name is Cassandra Thonstad and I am currently a teacher at Newberg High School in the Newberg School District. I work closely with our university partner George Fox University in preparing teacher candidates for their role as classroom teachers as a part of the TeachOregon Project and I am a member of the Distinguished Educators Council – a group of 15 educators recognized for their leadership from around Oregon. I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 83 Training for Cooperating Teachers.

I have known since the second grade that I wanted to teach. In fact, I am a 4th generational math teacher in my family and grew up knowing that teaching is the best career I could ever hope to have. When it was my turn to be the student teacher in a classroom, to learn about teaching and to grow my own abilities as an educator, I was devastated to be placed with a teacher that wanted me to cover their paternity leave, and therefore gave me little guidance and then followed by being placed with a teacher who wanted me to do everything the same way they did, giving me little room to grow. My real first true experience in a classroom was the day I stepped into my first teaching job, ill prepared for what I was to face as a solo teacher in an isolated classroom having received little coaching or help.

As an experienced teacher, I knew it was my duty and privilege to be able to give new teacher candidates a better experience than I had, which would enable them to accelerate towards excellence in this amazing profession, but it couldn't be in the same types of programs that I attended a dozen years ago. It had to be better.

I have served as a co-teacher with 5 teacher candidates from George Fox. There are so many differences from a traditional student teacher experience, but allow me to highlight the ones that impact our students the most:

First, students never lose their original teacher. In fact, in many cases, our teacher candidates begin the year with us learning to build a classroom community, which sets teachers up for success all year long. The teacher candidate and the cooperating teacher work together to enhance student learning through better differentiation, remediation, and acceleration because the student to teacher ratio is cut in half giving students the opportunity to work with different teaching styles and in smaller groups. Better trained cooperating teachers allow for more appropriate learning opportunities for our students.

Second, our teacher candidates and cooperating teachers in the Teach Oregon project are given professional learning opportunities several times throughout the year to ensure better quality teaching and better cooperation between teaching teams. Students benefit by having an experienced teacher in the classroom at all times and by having a new teacher who comes with new ideas and renewed energy to share within the classroom. Both teachers have the opportunity to learn from each other and are given time in their professional learning to share out and dig deeper in the work they do. Better trained cooperating teachers allow for growth minded veteran teachers in our buildings.

Last, we work to ensure that teaching teams are purposefully chosen so that both the cooperating teacher and the teacher candidate choose to work together. Dynamic teams have evolved from this purposeful placement process that is so different from the usual cold call to

place candidates in the fall for the sole purpose of accreditation. Our candidates are observed more often and given more feedback to grow and change in their practice. This influences both the teacher candidate and the cooperating teacher, growing the practice of both! Better trained cooperating teachers allow for better teacher candidates entering our schools prepared to take on the challenges they will face.

The reality is, the teacher candidates coming out of our Teach Oregon programs are much better prepared for taking on their own classroom and are much more ready to be a part of the collaborative teams in their schools. This requires training for the cooperating teachers and the teacher candidates and should also lead to additional pay and recognition for those completing the program. It is essential that we prioritize teacher preparation programs if we want to ensure that our students continue to learn in meaningful ways, leading to higher achievements for all students.

Preparing effective teachers for our schools is one of the most significant things we can do to improve instruction in our schools and close the achievement gap. Thank you for your time and your consideration of SB 83.