



KATHLEEN TAYLOR
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 41
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HB 3319A

May 19, 2015

Senate Education Committee

Chair Roblan and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am Kathleen Taylor, State Representative for District 41, which includes Milwaukie, Oak Grove, and portions of Southeast Portland. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about House Bill 3319A dealing with chronic absenteeism and graduation rates in Oregon public schools.

We have all heard the dismal statistics.

- Oregon's graduation rate for the class of 2013 was 69%, the lowest in the country. Even though there is some disagreement about how the figures are calculated, Oregon has one of the worst graduation rates in the nation.
- In 2014, nearly 3 out of 10 Oregon seniors failed to earn a diploma in four years.
- Approximately 100,000 students in our state are chronically absent, missing 3.5 or more weeks of school a year.

How can we expect our students to stay on track for graduation, if they aren't in the classroom earning credits?

We clearly need to do better.

HB 3319A requires all school districts in Oregon to report to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) about the methods each district uses to address chronic absenteeism and reduce high school dropout rates. ODE will analyze this information and report back to the legislature about actions taken to increase graduation and reduce absenteeism across the state.

By taking the time to evaluate and disseminate information about the most effective ways to keep our students in school and on track to graduate, we can begin the hard work of increasing Oregon's graduation rates.

I want to make it really clear: This is an information gathering enterprise. It is not meant to be punitive or burdensome. The format for such reporting is up to the department and they clearly understand the goals of this legislation. What ARE our school districts currently doing, right now?

My understanding is that some districts are eager to do more. Efforts are being made by districts, either individually or collectively, to move forward with additional plans to address absenteeism and the dropout rates. This bill does not preclude, prevent, or pre-empt any of those efforts. I strongly support such efforts and look forward to hearing about them.

But we need to know what is happening right now. Once we know what districts are doing, that information can be shared statewide; districts may review, revise and adopt programs that others are using that meet their local needs.

Colleagues, as we strive to reach our 40-40-20 education goals, Oregon's drop out and absenteeism rates are too big to ignore. I urge you to support HB 3319A.