

March 16, 2017

Testimony in Support of SB 746
By Betsy Salter, Portland Public School Parent

I am writing to support SB 746 to establish the Superintendent of Public Instruction as statewide elective office. During the 2011 legislative session I was a Stand (for Children) team leader and was concerned by their top down decision to advocate for making the Governor the Superintendent of Public Instruction and then creating a multi-layered state bureaucracy to work in parallel with the existing Department of Education and State Board of Education to oversee Oregon's K-12 public education system.

I decided to step down from Stand and lobby against centralizing decision making regarding our public schools in the Governor's office. Unfortunately, Stand prevailed and Oregon public schools were not only saddled with a new and ineffective Chief Education Officer, a new K-12 Deputy Superintendent position that conducted himself more as a bully/enforcer than as an inspirational instructional leader, the new Oregon Education "investment" Board that worked in parallel to our existing State Board of Education and a new Chief Education Office that worked in parallel to our existing Oregon Dept. of Education. It was and to the extent some components remain in place, continues to be a mess.

As a parent and public school advocate it is impossible to keep track of what is going on with respect to education policies in the Governor's Chief Education Office, the Oregon Department of Education and the State Legislature - not to mention the Oregon Business Council, Stand on Children, Chalkboard and ALEC's efforts to legislate their public education privatization agenda.

Now that we have a President of the United States and a Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education that are determined public education privatizers, Oregon must get serious about streamlining its state education bureaucracy and focusing like a laser beam on supporting and defending our public schools and their students and families. Let's return to the days when we had an elected Superintendent of Public Instruction in charge of the Oregon Department of Education and who reported to the State Board of Education. Of course the Governor should have an Education Advisor to serve as a liaison with the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Board of Education - but not an entire staff doing who knows what.

I hope this will also provide the opportune time to disband the multimillion dollar (at least) Statewide Longitudinal (Student) Data System which I believe is happening in the Chief Education Office. Perhaps there are some worthy programs that should be transferred from the Governor's Chief Education Office to the ODE, but the SLDS needs to go away before the state wastes millions more in taxpayer funds and puts our children's personal data even further at risk.

<http://katu.com/news/politics/state-building-multimillion-dollar-database-to-track-student-outcomes>

I am also deeply concerned about Secretary of State Richardson's decision to meet with U.S. Secretary of Education DeVos given the lack of a clear State leader in charge of Oregon's Public Education System. If we had an elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction that wasn't also wearing the hat of Governor, Secretary Richardson could not so nonchalantly decide to meet with Secretary DeVos as the "de facto second in command" for the state of Oregon.

Please support SB 746. It makes sense for Oregon students and families. It makes sense for Oregon taxpayers. During a time when our schools are facing painful budget cuts - the state government needs to share in that pain by eliminating areas where the state education bureaucracy expanded and have not demonstrated benefits for the education of Oregon public school students.

Thank you for considering my concerns and support for SB 746.

Sincerely,

Betsy Salter
Portland, OR