

Testimony on Senate Bill 889, April 6, 2017

What SB 889 does:

- [1] Creates study on funding for Talented and Gifted [TAG] students
- [2] Restates Oregon Administrative Rules concerning accountability measures

Why is this needed?

Section 1: TAG services are mandated by state law because regular classroom instruction does not meet the needs of very advanced students. There is no federal or state funding to support district TAG services (a grant-in-aid of \$350,000 per biennium funds a state TAG specialist position).

TAG students do not require the same level of service as other special needs students, but they do require some adaptations in curriculum and instruction to address their learning needs. This will also help Oregon's economic development as there is a need for highly-educated workers.

- The current situation is inequitable: there are very large differences among districts in the proportion of students identified, spending per student, and the services available to students.
- Nearly half of the districts in Oregon do not spend anything on TAG services.
- Testimony on HB 2419 to the House Education Committee this session shows how the lack of appropriate instruction for TAG students is unnecessarily harming them. <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Measures/Exhibits/HB2419>
- The students most injured by this are high-achieving African-American, Hispanic and low income students. <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Measures/Exhibits/HB2419>

Section 3: Oregon Administrative Rule 581-022-1610 requires that districts report on their compliance with state school standards (all the Rules contained in OAR 581-022....) annually to both their communities AND to the Department of Education.

- In 2014, the Department of Education announced that in the future it would only require submission of the full reports every three years. There was no process for this announcement; it was simply included in meeting materials for the State Board of Education.
- *This change did not reduce paperwork for districts. This bill will not increase paperwork for districts.* Districts must still submit annual reports to their communities. However, the change did reduce the accountability of districts to the Department as the community reports do not have to be signed and the Department does not follow up on the community reports.
- Aside from the annual reports, the Division 22 Standards *also* govern appeal and complaint procedures. When parents or others try to complain about violations of the standards and districts do not follow the Rules concerning appeals and complaints, there is no recourse.
- TAG parents have encountered both these roadblocks: failure to implement the TAG standards in the first place and failure by some districts to handle complaints about lack of TAG services in an adequate and timely manner. Many other Oregon parents have encountered similar problems when alleging violations of the standards.
- It is inappropriate for a state agency to unilaterally abrogate its own Administrative Rules as the Department did in 2014. We are therefore requesting that the Rule concerning the Division 22 Assurances be placed in statute.

Contact: Margaret DeLacy, Government Relations Committee, Oregon Association for Talented and Gifted, P.O. Box 1703, Beaverton OR, 97075

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION – ADMINISTRATIVE RULE SUMMARY

Title/OAR #: Compliance with State Standards / OR 581-022-1610

Date: December 11, 2014

Staff/Office: Emily Nazarov, ODE

New Rule Amend Existing Rule Repeal Rule
Hearing Date: 11/21/14 Hearings Officer Report Attached
Prompted by: State law changes Federal law changes Other

Action Requested:

First Reading/Second Reading Adoption Adoption/Consent Agenda

PROPOSED/AMENDED RULE SUMMARY: Reduces and clarifies Division 22 reporting obligations for districts.

BACKGROUND:

Districts must comply with the regulations set forth in OAR Chapter 581, Division 22 (“Division 22 standards”). Districts are required to report their compliance with Division 22 standards to the community and submit assurances of their compliance to the Department.

The purpose of the proposed revisions is to clarify what is expected of districts in terms of Division 22 reporting. In addition, ODE will be reducing the amount of reporting required. Districts will be required to report full Division 22 assurances every three years. In the intervening years, districts will be asked to report on 3-5 standards identified by ODE.

CHANGED SINCE LAST BOARD MEETING? (so members can focus on what’s different)

- N/A; first read—hasn’t been before board
 No; same as last month
 Yes – As follows:

FISCAL IMPACT:

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

- Adopt administrative rule as prepared this month
 Adopt administrative rule next month
 No recommendation at this time

OAR 581-022-0807

Standardization

- (1) A school district, to be standard, must provide acceptable educational opportunities for all Oregon students who reside in the district regardless of where they live in the district.
- (2) Local school districts shall cooperate with procedures to verify compliance with state standards, to collect information about schools, to identify exemplary performance, and to promote school improvement.
- (3) Methods of verifying compliance and identifying practices or conditions needing improvement shall include:**
 - (a) Assurances of the district school board designated chief administrative officer;**
 - (b) Review of district materials through Department of Education desk audit;**
 - (c) On-site review of practices or conditions; and**
 - (d) Other methods selected by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.**
- (3) The Superintendent or a designee of the superintendent shall declare a school district as “Nonstandard” as defined in OAR 581-022-0102, after verification through the methods described in section (2) of this rule.

Stat. Auth.: ORS 326.051

Stats. Implemented: ORS 326.051 & 327.103

Hist.: 1EB 3-1985, f. 1-4-85, ef. 1-7-85; ODE 25-2008, f. & cert. ef. 9-26-08

OAR 581-022-1610

Operating Policies and Procedures

- (1) Districts must comply with the state standards set forth in OAR chapter 581, division 22.
- (2) Districts must maintain evidence of compliance with the state standards and make such evidence available upon request.
- (3) Districts must report compliance with state standards:**
 - (a) To the community by January 15 of each school year; and**
 - (b) To the Department of Education, annually, on a form to be provided by the Department of Education.**

Stat. Auth.: ORS 326.051

Stats. Implemented: ORS 326.051

Oregon Administrative Rules affected by SB 889

- *All* Rules on this list are covered by the accountability procedures in 581-022-0807 and 581-022-1610 and thus changes in compliance reporting may affect implementation of all the rules below.
- Underlined Rules concern accountability procedures. These include compliance reporting and parent/community complaint procedures. Thus changes in the reporting schedule have *also* undermined the alternative complaint/appeal procedures that provide accountability.

DIVISION 22 STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

581-022-0102 Definitions

581-022-0405 Career Education

581-022-0413 Prevention Education Programs in Drugs and Alcohol

581-022-0416 Anabolic Steroids and Performance Enhancing Substances

581-022-0421 Safety of School Sports — Concussions

581-022-0606 District Continuous Improvement Plan

581-022-0610 Administration of State Assessments

581-022-0612 Exception of Students with Disabilities from State Assessment Testing

581-022-0615 Assessment of Essential Skills

581-022-0617 Essential Skills for English Language Learners

581-022-0620 Test Development

581-022-0705 Health Services

581-022-0711 Policies on Reporting of Child Abuse

581-022-0807 Standardization

581-022-1020 State Goals for Elementary and Secondary Education

581-022-1030 Local District Goals

581-022-1060 School and District Performance Report Criteria

581-022-1130 Diploma Requirements

581-022-1131 Credit Options

581-022-1133 Extended Diploma

581-022-1134 Modified Diploma

581-022-1135 Alternative Certificate

581-022-1140 Equal Educational Opportunities

581-022-1210 District Curriculum

581-022-1215 Literacy Instruction

581-022-1310 Identification of Academically Talented and Intellectually Gifted Students

581-022-1320 Rights of Parents of Talented and Gifted Students

581-022-1330 Programs and Services for Talented and Gifted Students

581-022-1340 Special Education for Children with Disabilities

581-022-1350 Alternative Education Programs

581-022-1362 Expanded Options — Purpose

581-022-1363 Expanded Options — Definitions

581-022-1364 Expanded Options — Requirements for Oregon Public School Districts

581-022-1365 Expanded Options — Annual Notice

581-022-1366 Expanded Options — Annual Credit Hour Cap

581-022-1367 Expanded Options — Responsibilities of Eligible Students

581-022-1368 Expanded Options — State School Fund, Expenditures, Request for Waiver

581-022-1370 Expanded Options — Alternative Programs

581-022-1371 Expanded Options — Charter School Participation

581-022-1372 Expanded Options — Request for Program Waiver

581-022-1420 Emergency Plans and Safety Programs

581-022-1430 Asbestos Management Plans

581-022-1440 Human Sexuality Education

581-022-1510 Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling

581-022-1512 Child Development Specialist Programs

581-022-1520 Media Programs

581-022-1530 Auxiliary Services

581-022-1610 Operating Policies and Procedures

581-022-1620 Required Instructional Time

581-022-1622 Independent Adoptions of Instructional Materials

581-022-1630 Daily Class Size

581-022-1640 Instructional Materials Adoption

581-022-1650 Postponement of Purchase of State-Adopted Instructional Materials

581-022-1660 Records and Reports

581-022-1661 Report on Physical Education Data

581-022-1670 Individual Student Assessment, Recordkeeping, Grading, and Reporting

581-022-1710 Personnel

581-022-1720 Personnel Policies

581-022-1723 Teacher and Administrator Evaluation and Support

581-022-1724 Core Teaching Standards

581-022-1725 Educational Leadership — Administrator Standards

581-022-1730 Fingerprinting of Subject Individuals in Positions Not Requiring Licensure as Teachers, Administrators, Personnel Specialists, School Nurses

581-022-1910 Exemptions

581-022-1920 Waivers and Permission

581-022-1940 Appeal Procedure

581-022-1941 Complaint Procedures

581-022-2130 Kindergarten Assessment

581-022-2223 Healthy and Safe Schools Plan

581-022-2440 Teacher Training Related to Dyslexia

News Articles from the *Portland Tribune* and the *Wallowa County Chieftain*

Documenting breakdown in complaint procedures concerning violations of the Division 22 Standards in Portland Public Schools and in Enterprise

Portland Public Schools' complaint process baffles, frustrates

Created on Thursday, 30 March 2017 | Written by [Shasta Kearns Moore](#) | 

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In the second of a three-part series, we look at the district's plans to reform its complaint process and a PPS leader who some say has had a chilling effect on accountability.



This story was updated from its original version.

After the applause died down celebrating the Jefferson High School basketball team's state championship, the mood at Portland Public Schools' March 21 board meeting grew more somber.

Of the seven public comments, three were from people worried about budget cuts. The rest were from parents complaining of a lack of information, a lack of response or serious neglect in their schools.

TRIBUNE PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - The final step of the Portland Public Schools complaint process is to appeal to the school board. At the March 21 meeting, many public comments were unofficial complaints about the way the district functions.



"I just want to tell you that the parents are frustrated," Eszter Vegh told the school board in her testimony, speaking about a new restriction on out-of-district transfers into the Kelly Elementary School Russian language immersion program.

Parents ask her constantly, "Did you get an answer?" ... "What more can we do to get an answer?" Vegh says.

"I feel powerless," she says, "and I think they do, too."

Conflict resolution, PPS-style

TUESDAY: Complainants who go all the way to the top still feel frustrated

TODAY: How a complaint process should work and district efforts at reform

NEXT WEEK: Absent a good complaint process, many say they have been given or threatened with trespass notices

The complaint process at Portland Public Schools is just two years old, but is already getting an overhaul due to sentiments like this. Parents frequently say they are fed up with not being taken seriously and bewildered by the lack of response to simple questions.

State mandate

Under Oregon Administrative Rules, school districts are required to have a formal complaint process spelled out and made clear to parents.

Until November 2014, PPS didn't.

Since then, according to some, the district still fails to explain or implement clear processes to resolve grievances.

PPS parent Kim Sordyl, now a member of the State Board of Education, says people are unable to find resolution through an internal process, so instead they are voicing their concerns at public meetings and to the press.

"The complaint process has been going to the school board and complaining very loudly," Sordyl says. "That's the only way to get anything done."

Michael Casserly is executive director of the Council of Great City Schools, an organization of the nation's largest urban school districts. He says his member districts typically have systems in place to track and address complaints.

"Usually for the big city school districts, that often involves having somebody serve as either the head of a call center or an ombudsman, something of that nature by which parent issues are directed," Casserly says. "Typically, that person distributes the complaint to the appropriate person in the district and tracks those to identify any broader systemic issues."

Complaining to the ombudsman

Judi Martin is the district's new ombudsman — a position that was brought back in 2015. Martin was unavailable to speak by press time, according to district spokespeople.

The ombudsman uses voluntary, informal means to resolve conflicts; the role is not intended to have teeth.

Complaints made to the ombudsman are also confidential, even to other district staff.

A February 2017 [report](#) shows 156 ombudsman office contacts from Aug. 1 to Jan. 31; 110 of these were complaints over policies or practices. According to the report, 102 of the complaints were informally resolved. Seven complaints are still pending and 11 were unable to be completed.

In most large urban districts, Casserly says, there are two common reasons for parents to remain frustrated after filing a complaint. First, the school district is working on the complaint, or resolved the problem, but didn't circle back to the parents to tell them. Second, the complaint is about an employee and the school district is unable to disclose if any disciplinary action was taken, fearing a lawsuit from the employee. Regardless, he says, it's best practice for districts to circle back to the complainants.

"In general, it makes sense for the school system to create a way in which the parent is informed about how their complaint was resolved or addressed," he says.

Changes under consideration

District officials know the current system is flawed.

"We agree that there have been people who have expressed confusion over just how the complaint process works," says PPS Senior Legal Counsel Jeff Fish. Fish has been helping a four-person work group rewrite the complaint resolution process document over the past couple months.

While the school board-approved policy won't actually change, the explanation of the complaint procedure will get an overhaul, Fish says, to be more clear to the public.

The complaint process will continue to have three "steps." An official complaint will still start at the district office, then could be appealed to the superintendent, then appealed to the school board.

(Separately, people also can file complaints with the Oregon Department of Education or the U.S. Department of Education, or other relevant agencies.)

The revision will focus on three parts.

First, officials want to distinguish between an official written "complaint" and what is simply a "concern," such as a student not being picked up on time by the school bus or a disagreement about math curriculum. Fish says principals probably put out a dozen such fires every day, and most of those are resolved at the school level, as they should be.

A written complaint on a new districtwide universal form would count as a formal complaint and go higher up the food chain.

New complaint coordinator?

The second change the district wants to make is to have a complaint coordinator who would get complaints to the right person, track the resolutions and follow up with the complainant.

"We want one door, so there's one gatekeeper for all of these and one tracker for all of these," Fish says. That way, the agency can know "what actually happens, and how to make sure that we as the district know what's happening with each complaint."

Finally, the new administrative directive will say more clearly that several departments within PPS have their own independent complaint procedures.

For example, complaints about employees go as high as the human resources director, but cannot be appealed to the superintendent or school board. Complaints about athletics, student transfers and, bizarrely, even civil rights complaints over Nutrition Services, all have their own processes. That's often because there are specific rules about them in state or federal law.

The complaint revision is in the early draft stages. Fish says he hopes to get a new administrative directive and complaint form vetted through district staff, union leadership, and potentially community members, by the beginning of the fiscal year on July 1.

"We're going to try to resolve the vast majority of concerns at the lowest level possible," Fish says. "We hope that 99 percent are handled at the lowest level. That would show that we have functional principals and department managers who want to make things right for the patrons."

Activist blames assistant superintendent for lack of resolutions

Parent activist and state Board of Education member Kim Sordyl accuses Assistant Superintendent Antonio Lopez of being responsible for Portland Public Schools' culture of poor complaint management.

"I think he's at the top of the heap when it comes to hiding problems," Sordyl says. "I think he's hugely responsible for it."

Lopez is one of the few top-level administrators left at the district after a year of exodus from the central office. Promoted in 2014, Lopez is now responsible for the 10 senior directors who oversee each school cluster's principals.

Lopez was unavailable for comment, according to district spokespeople.

Lopez was secretly video-recorded at a Jan. 5 regular meeting of school administrators at the Holiday Inn Airport outlining a new policy requiring administrators to report conversations with school board members or attempts by these elected representatives to contact them.

"If a board member asks you to do something other than in their capacity as a parent, you need to let the senior director know," Lopez says in the video. "Obviously, there are times when you will have to use your best judgment with respect to your interactions with board members."

The assistant superintendent stresses multiple times that the intent is not to restrict or micromanage

conversations with board members, but rather to create a clear chain of command and avoid duplication of efforts.

But one administrator who spoke on condition of anonymity says the mood in the room was "very tense" and the chilling effect from the announcement has been real.

"We felt intimidated," the administrator says. "This is another way of covering up what's going on in our schools."

She says this puts administrators in a Catch-22 position when elected officials ask how their schools are doing. Are they supposed to decline to speak with them for fear of getting in trouble? "Or are you supposed to be honest and say: 'Hey, I'm not getting the support that I need here?'" the school manager said, adding that the same worries extend to speaking openly with the media. "It's that fear of retaliation, it's that fear of being disciplined that keeps you from doing things."

District officials, responding to a public records request from Sordyl, say the notes Lopez was reading from were not retained and that there is no written policy on communications with board members.

School board member Steve Buel, who is known for his sharp criticisms of the district's lack of transparency, says he is not concerned, as this directive was abandoned after he talked to the interim superintendent and Lopez.

"There's nothing really there," Buel says. "It just kind of died of its own stupidity."

He agrees that district administrators often have reason for feeling intimidated, but blames the perception that Lopez is responsible for it on past district leadership.

"Antonio really cares about handling the problem and solving the problem. When he was working for Carole Smith, he had his hands tied," Buel argues. "He got a reputation for not doing a good job. Well, Carole wouldn't let him do a good job."

A phone call to Smith, the former longtime superintendent, was not returned by press time.

UPDATE: This story corrected the reference to Kelly Elementary School.

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Portland schools struggle to find way to handle complaints

Created on Tuesday, 28 March 2017 | Written by [Shasta Kearns Moore](#) | 

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In the first of a three-part series, we hear from people who take their complaints all the way to the top and still don't get satisfaction.



TRIBUNE PHOTO: JONATHAN HOUSE - Natalie Hval has filed a civil rights complaint against Portland Public Schools over its decision to deny her son Nate's entry into a gifted school, which she believes is due to his disability.

Natalie Hval is trying to decide whether or not to give up the supports her son receives for his disability so that he can take a coveted spot in ACCESS Academy.

Hval recently filed a federal civil rights complaint alleging that her son with special needs was denied access to the gifted school because of his disability. She now says the district has found a spot for him at the school, but that they won't be able to accommodate his additional support needs.

PORTLAND TRIBUNE

So Hval has to decide: Give up his special support and hope it all works out, or insist on his disability accommodations and miss the opportunity she's been fighting for?

Hval says she has been fighting for her son's needs for years but **the complaint process at Portland Public Schools is murky and daunting.**

"I think the complaint process is pretty intimidating for everybody," Hval says. "It's hard to get clear information about who you should talk to and what the steps are."

Conflict resolution, PPS-style

TODAY: Complainants who go all the way to the top still feel frustrated

THURSDAY: [How a complaint process should work and district efforts at reform](#)

NEXT WEEK: Absent a good complaint process, many say they have been given or threatened with trespass notices

Complaints come from all quarters

In any agency as large as PPS, there are bound to be problems. In any endeavor as important as the formation and safety of children, people are bound to be emotional or have strong opinions.

But PPS critics say the district has a poor and unevenly executed approach for how it addresses problems and complaints.

It's been a long-standing problem for the state's largest district.

Since 1990, Portland Public Schools has been named in at least 35 court complaints over alleged civil rights violations.

During the same period, the slightly smaller neighboring district of Beaverton has defended against about nine federal civil rights cases, and the state's second-largest district, Salem-Keizer, has had about 10.

PPS officials say they are aware of the criticisms of their complaint process and are working on improving it by developing clearer policies, designating a complaint coordinator and deploying a single, universal complaint form.

It's not just parents who say the district has a problem resolving complaints. Teachers, administrators and even a school board member say they have felt enormous pressure to ignore problems rather than resolve them.

Some complainants have been banned from school district property, discouraged from talking to elected representatives, or simply ignored for what they say is advocating for children.

Those with complaints offer mountains of documentation — file folders, PDFs, email chains, etc. — and seem desperate for someone to listen to them.

Administrators at the district often provided brief or off-the-record comments to parents and reporters, if they agreed to talk at all.

Board member's complaint stuck in limbo

Portland Public Schools is facing 17 open investigations from complaints filed with the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education.

The Beaverton School District has none. The Salem-Keizer School District has six.

The federal agency won't divulge much more than the number of investigations. A spokesman asked that his name not be used in this story and declined to answer questions, referring a reporter to the agency's website, where there are general descriptions of the civil rights complaint process.

Citing privacy concerns, the spokesman would not confirm basic details that even the complainants themselves are happy to have in the public realm.

Portland Public Schools board member Paul Anthony [made headlines](#) last summer when he announced that he was filing a federal discrimination complaint against his own district. He compiled spreadsheets that showed disparate course offerings between schools with different racial make-ups. He filed the federal complaint last May after feeling brushed off by then-Superintendent Carole Smith.

The move overjoyed some and puzzled others.

What isn't clear is what — if anything — has come of it, almost a year later.

The Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education is likely investigating Anthony's claim, but it may not be. The office would not confirm anything. The PPS legal office would not release letters sent to its office from the U.S. Department of Education, saying the letters were not theirs to hand over.

"And, even if (the district) is considered a custodian of a copy of the record, the record is exempt from disclosure under the federal law that governs (Office of Civil Rights) investigations while the OCR process is pending," says General Counsel Stephanie Harper.

Anthony says the latest he has heard is that the Office of Civil Rights is investigating, but that Harper is not allowing him to talk to them.

"Stephanie Harper is taking the position that since I am a board member and any admissions that I make are admissions by a district as a whole and would leave the district legally liable," Anthony says.

Harper confirms that she sees her responsibility to represent PPS and the Board of Education as a whole, therefore she represents Anthony in this matter. "... The attorneys who work for the federal Office of Civil Rights cannot consider Director Anthony to be a private citizen where this complaint is concerned," she argues.

It is unclear how she can represent someone who doesn't want her representation.

"I need to talk with my own counsel and figure out how we can proceed," Anthony says.

He also worries that the new Trump administration is not interested in following up on civil rights

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complaints.

"I think the thing is just liable to get shelved permanently," Anthony says.

The representative from the U.S. Department of Education declined to directly address Anthony's accusations.



TRIBUNE PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - Portland Public Schools board member Paul Anthony filed a complaint against the district with the federal Office of Civil Rights last summer, but is now blocked from communicating with investigators by the district's attorney.

Parents feel retaliation

A PPS parent, who wants to remain anonymous to avoid retaliation at work, also has an investigation underway through the Office of Civil Rights, after going through what she says were three tiers of the district's complaint process without resolution.

"I just got bounced around a lot," the mother said. "I went through so many people in the administration and nobody can answer my questions."

She says her daughter was denied entrance to the Woodstock School's Mandarin immersion program — which is close to where she lives in Southeast Portland — and instead placed at the King School Mandarin program in Northeast Portland. She worries this is because her family is not white and, at the time, they were low-income. After she complained about the placement and also about four injuries her daughter received at school, she says the district didn't respond.

Instead, they reported her to Child Protective Services.

"I don't feel like it was right for them to call CPS," she said. "I just felt like they put us through a lot for (trying to get answers to) a couple questions."

Hval, the mother of the special needs student who wants to go to ACCESS Academy, has similar feelings.

She says the district's ombudsman, a new position created in 2015 to hear complaints, was a waste of time and that the district didn't provide clear information on how to submit a formal complaint, despite that being a requirement of state administrative rules.

The [complaint process](#) is listed on the district's website. However, the role of the ombudsman in resolving complaints is unclear.

"It's almost like the Wild West or something," Hval says. "There's law and due process and when it actually comes to doing it, it doesn't happen."

Hval doesn't hold out much hope for the federal process to effect change either.

"I don't think OCR is going to force them to do anything," she says.

Next: How the district says it will update its two-year-old complaint process

Shasta Kearns Moore

Reporter

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Wallowa County CHIEFTAIN



It's not just about the kids anymore

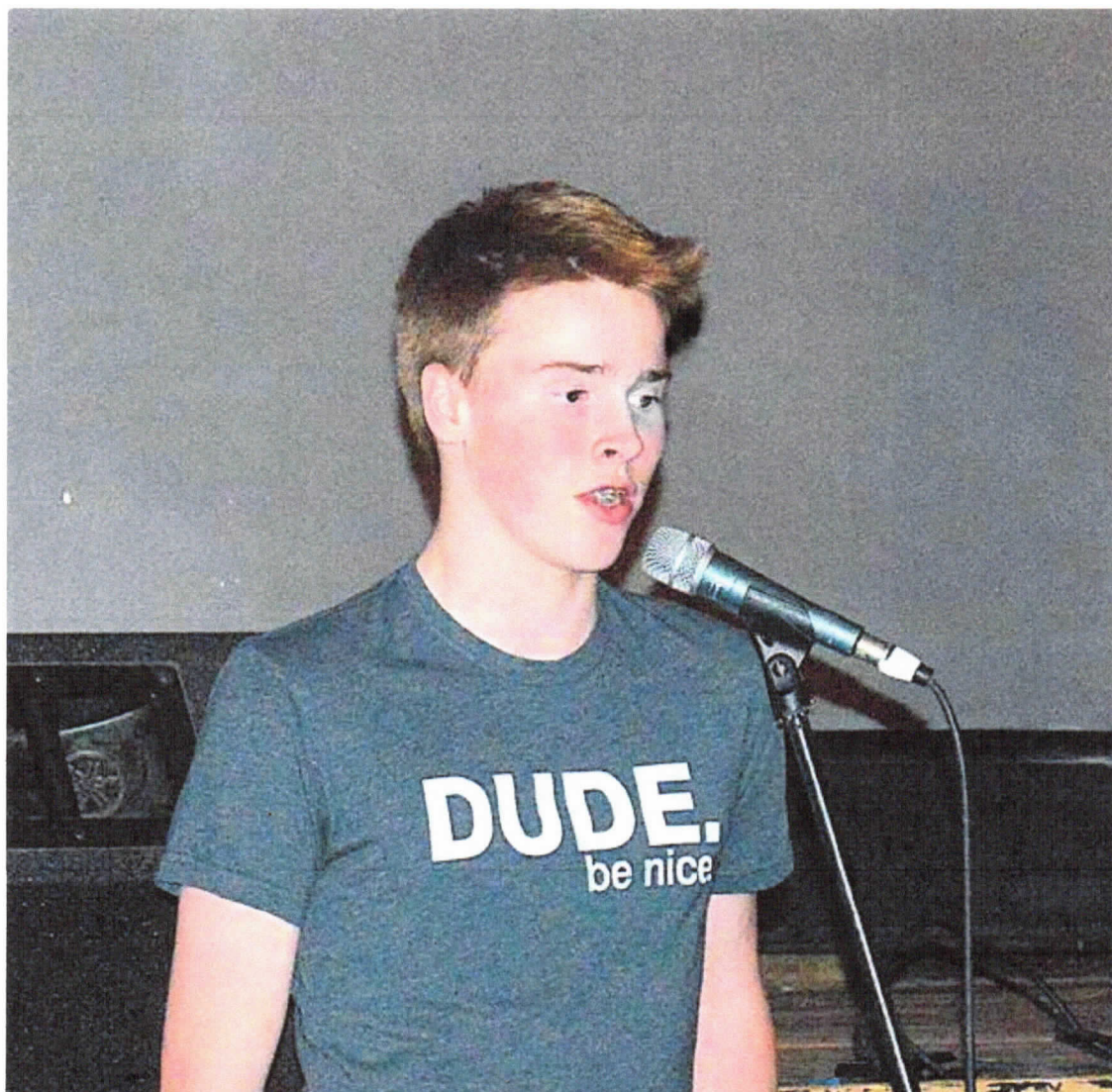
Bullying was the topic of a film shown at the OK Theater

By Steve Tool • Wallowa County Chieftain

Published on March 8, 2017 11:05AM

Last changed on March 9, 2017 2:48PM

ORS 581-022-1140



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STEVE TOOL/CHIEFTAIN

Enterprise High School freshman Jadon Garland addresses a crowd of more than 200 who attended the showing of the film "Bully" at the OK Theatre on Feb. 23. The film graphically addressed how the effects of bullying on children, parents and communities. Garland brought the film to the theatre as part of his Family, career and Community Leaders of America project.

Imagine the horror of a parent walking into a child's bedroom to find him hanging dead in a closet. Consider the pain of a middle-school child facing incessant bullying from the time he leaves home for the school bus stop until he returns – only to face more bullying from his father and sister, for being bullied.

A crowd of more than 200 witnessed these and other tragedies when they attended the showing of the documentary film "Bully" at the OK Theatre Thursday night.

The local movie showing was part of a Future Career, Community Leaders of America project of Enterprise High School freshman Jadon Garland. The EHS student took up the project at the urging of his mother Julie Garland, who counseled at the school in the past.

The film addresses bullying through telling the stories of five bullied youths. Two of the bullying victims, including an 11-year-old boy, eventually committed suicide. The other three victims included a gay student and two students bullied for the crime of "being different." It is not a movie for the squeamish.

The 2011 movie, shot at schools in Iowa, Texas, Mississippi and Oklahoma during the 2009-2010 school year, contains explicit bullying scenes as well as graphic scenes of family dynamics centered on bullying and the two families dealing with the tragic deaths of their children.

One poignant scene shows one of the victims, taunted beyond endurance, bringing a firearm on the school bus and threatening her tormentors with it in graphic language. Perhaps even more disturbing is the indifference in communities and even school administrators. Some of them denied a bullying problem existed even when faced with video evidence.

Several local teachers, students from all the county's schools watched the film. No school administrators attended.

A mostly subdued audience left the building after the film. Jadon Garland called the event a success in getting out the word about bullying.

"We had a good crowd; it was exactly what we wanted. It was very inspiring; I hope it made an impact."

"We had some teaching staff here and students from all three schools, and that was great. I'm very pleased," said Tamarah Duncan, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America adviser.

Julie Garland appreciated both the teen and adult turnout. She also mentioned possible follow-up with the "Natural Helpers" group at the county's schools, composed of teens selected by their peers as safe to air out their problems. "The goal of that program is that by strengthening that program, you're strengthening the overall school environment."

“We don’t have a problem?”

It’s unpleasant to think that Wallowa County Schools harbor bullies. But the 2016 Oregon Student Wellness Survey indicates that is the case.

That survey indicated that eighth grade bullying here is above statewide norms. In particular, taunts berating children for their physical characteristics or clothing far exceeded state levels. Taunts over alleged sexual preferences are high on the list as well. Although the statistics show many of these problems are resolved by the 11th grade, the survey shows higher than average rates of fistfights on school property as well as occasions of students being threatened with a weapon on school grounds.

However, Building Healthy Families Youth Prevention Coordinator Jason Wilcox cautioned that the survey results are possibly misleading because it is the first time the county’s schools have taken the survey in a number of years. Jason Wilcox said the 2016 survey would establish a baseline and subsequent surveys would determine if the 2016 results are an anomaly.

Bringing it all back home

“Tom,” a student at the Building Healthy Families’ Alternative Education School is a local victim of bullying as well as suffering from severe depression. He first saw the movie about two years ago, and it made an impression on him.

So he can speak candidly about a personal matter in a small community, Tom’s identity is being obscured by the Chieftain.

“I know it’s cliché, but I thought, ‘Wow, I’m not the only one. I’m not the only person this is happening to. But I also felt pretty bad about myself.’”

Tom transferred from one of the county’s schools to another after the sixth grade because of unaddressed bullying issues. He later transferred to.

“The first school is when my depression started happening. I started getting uncomfortable around myself and others and feeling very suicidal,” Tom said.

After the parents of a concerned friend called the school, Tom started seeing a counselor to ease his troubles. Although the counselor worked out a coping plan for Tom, he stopped attending after an outburst. He subsequently transferred to another junior high in the county.

Tom started at the new school with optimism, thinking he could turn over a new leaf. He hadn’t accounted for rumors and the proximity of the county’s schools.

“Rumors spread like wildfire: ‘Don’t talk to him; he’s a psychopath, a murderer.’ All I said was: I wanted them to leave me alone forever. They took that as a death threat,” Tom said.

He tried melting into the background with limited success.

“The popular kids started targeting me. They know I’m depressed and suffer from social anxiety. They made it worse just for the fun of it, for the laughs,” he said. **Complaints to school staff led to intensified bullying, escalating from**

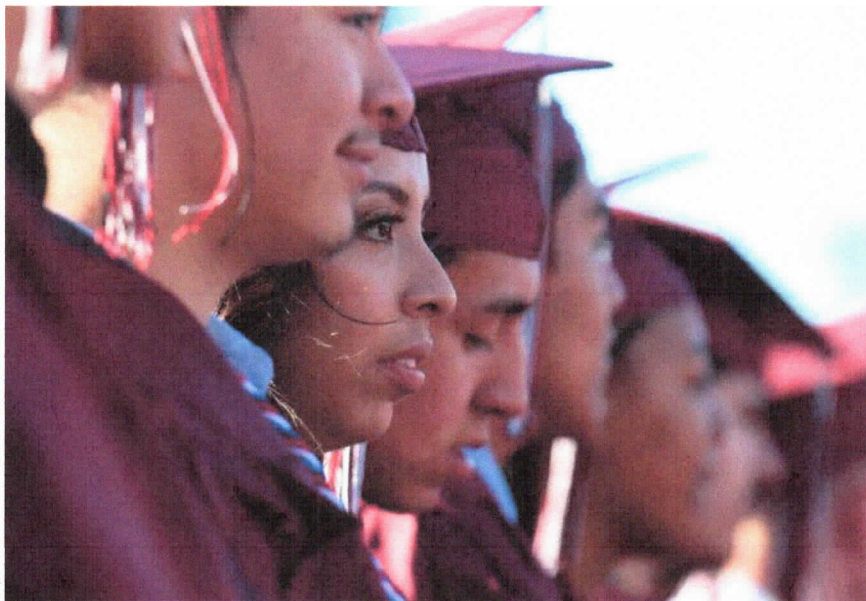
general taunting to Tom being punched, shoved into lockers and even pushed down a staircase.

Tom said that even complaints to the school principal led nowhere. At the end of the school year he was transferred to the Alt Ed school. He worried about the new school after his previous experiences but received reassurances from BHF executive director and Alt Ed instructor Maria Weer that he would fit in. "Maria gave me confidence, which I really needed," he said. Enrolled at the school for several years now, Tom is in a comfortable place. "I have a lot of friends here. It's really nice."

This, his second viewing of the film brought an amount of satisfaction. "I felt like I'd crossed over a milestone. I'm still here, I'm still breathing. I'm still making people smile," Tom said.



Oregon Department of Education accepts appeal about instructional time from Portland Public Schools parents coalition



The class of 2012 graduates from Franklin High School, Portland Public Schools is the subject of a complaint alleging they are out of compliance with state rules mandating instructional time. (Randy Rasmussen/The Oregonian)



By **Nicole Dungca** | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

[Email the author](#)

on November 25, 2013 at 5:14 PM, updated November 26, 2013 at 7:52 AM

The Oregon Department of Education has officially accepted the **complaint filed by Portland Public Schools parents** alleging the district is not offering enough instructional time to high school students.

Parents in late October filed a complaint to the state education department to push the district to provide more instructional time in its high schools, saying the current practice shortchanges students.

Portland officials have insisted they are following state rules and have even issued press releases ensuring parents the district is in compliance.

But Cindy Hunt, the state agency's government and legal affairs manager, sent a formal letter Monday saying officials are investigating whether PPS is out of compliance with three state requirements:

- the failure to provide a minimum of 990 hours of instructional time per year
- the failure to provide 130 hours of instructional time per course
- the failure to establish a process for complaint resolution

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So what does that mean?

The district now has 30 days to provide a response, according to the letter. The letter also said the state hopes to issue a written decision should within 60 days, as governed by state law, but acknowledges it may take longer because of the holidays.

Caroline Fenn, one of the parents who filed the complaint, noted that if the state finds PPS out of compliance, the district would need to extend the school year by 12 days and add even more high school teachers to meet requirements.

Hunt, in an interview earlier this month, has said the district would be given a timeline to get into compliance if the allegations are found to be true. The state would use punitive action -- such as withholding state funding -- only if the district refuses to follow that plan, according to officials.

Here's another twist: the state has noted that districts have essentially been given a free pass with instructional time for the past two years. Districts have not been required to submit paperwork saying they are in compliance with instructional time requirements, according to Hunt.

Want more information? You can read the letter to parents below or **read up on past coverage**.

State threatens to withhold funding for Portland Public Schools over class time

by Anna Canzano On Your Side Investigator, KATU

Friday, March 14th 2014

PORTLAND, Ore. -- Oregon's deputy superintendent of public instruction, Rob Saxton, is threatening to withhold funding for Portland Public Schools if it doesn't take corrective action with regard to student class time. He's also warning that high school credits for students in the 2014-2015 could be invalidated.

At issue is a complaint filed by the Portland Parents Coalition. The group turned to the state last fall after a member analyzed the Portland Public Schools class schedules, compared them to the state's administrative rules, and discovered students were being shortchanged on their education.

The coalition's complaint to the Oregon Department of Education actually covered three topics:

- The failure of PPS to provide a minimum of 990 hours of instructional time per year in grades 9-12
- The failure of PPS to offer students 130 hours of instructional time per credit
- The failure of PPS to establish a process for complaint resolution

Of these three matters, Saxton agreed in his ruling with the latter two, and said he had grave concerns regarding the district's compliance with the spirit of the law on the first.

Caroline Fenn, with the Parents Coalition, credited fellow member John Richardson for meticulously counting instructional hours built into the class schedule and factoring assemblies, testing time and parent-teacher conferences.

She says when the district implemented an eight period schedule in 2011-2012, there was a lot of testimony that spring, and a lot of parents realized then the district wasn't meeting the 130-hour requirement.

She says another issue is that the district is actually restricting how many classes kids are allowed to take; students weren't allowed to forecast for eight classes. The coalition's take was the district had to allow students to take the classes they want to take in order to claim it's meeting the 990-hour per year requirement.

Both Saxton and Fenn say the state's ruling won't affect high school seniors slated to

graduate this June, but Fenn adds there is still work to be done around the verification of assurance compliance reports produced by schools.

"There isn't a really good auditing process in place right now, so it would be great to get that improved. That might have helped resolve the situation earlier if there had been more checks and balances," said Fenn.....

PPS has re-established and is in the process of hiring for the District Parent & Family Ombudsman position. This position will be filled by June 1, 2014. The first responsibility of the new Ombudsman will be to review and develop recommendations for improving PPS parent-complaint processes. PPS will ensure that all complaint procedures are simplified and in compliance with state standards.