

Hello Chair Doherty and members of the committee,

My name is Marianna Roman and I am a Hispanic Outreach Worker at W.L. Henry Elementary School in Hillsboro. Our school lost busing in the 2009-2010 school year, and I believe it has a negative impact on our students.

W.L. Henry is located in Hillsboro and serves about 345 students, 76% of our students are English Language Learners. We qualify for the Community Eligibility Provision of the 2013 Healthy of Hunger Free Kids Act, meaning we are identified as one of the nation's highest poverty schools. What our families lack in economic means, they make up for in passion for their children and their school. We have an active parent group that has taken on this busing issue.

The Busing Issue

All students live within a mile of school, and are not eligible for reimbursement from the state under current statute. The district used to provide busing anyway, but removed it in the 2009-2010 school year due to budget cuts. When we lost busing, parents knew this was an immediate issue. They don't have many other options. Some pay to have others drive their children to school, which creates an economic burden on an already tight budget. Some walk with them, which can cut into their work hours and also causes an economic burden on an already burdened family. And if they cannot do either of those things, they just worry. They worry about their children's safety. They worry that their children won't get to school on time to be ready to learn, and they worry that they won't get to school at all.

Faced with the choice of economic burden or this worry for their children's education, my parents began organizing. For the last few years, parents have organized to ask the district to reinstate busing. They have talked to multiple people in the district, and have yet to be successful. As a group, we contacted Rep. Susan McLain last February to bring this issue to her attention. She met with me, and then met with all parents about this. After hearing the from parents, her office has continued to work on this issue. Now, we are bringing it to the attention of the House Education Committee. We believe the lack of busing is holding our students back. We believe the Committee would be concerned about the outcomes created or exacerbated by the lack of busing.

Student Outcomes

Health and Safety

The letter from my parents details the concerns about the safety. I have also personally noticed safety issues starting with street conditions. We lack sidewalks on most the streets in the area. We have had the help of Safe Routes to School, but they lacked funds to build sidewalks. They were able to re-route some pathways, but most of our official pathways are still without sidewalks, you can see the map on the W.L. Henry District Map - Sidewalk Inventory (February 2016). Speed data shows cars in the area speed, and I have heard numerous reports of cars not checking for children when backing out of their driveways. As someone who drives to WL Henry, I can tell you the road is hardly visible. There is a nearby creek and mornings in the neighborhood are often foggy.

There are also other safety risks. We have two registered sex offenders in the area, we have a population of drug users in the area, and many students and parents have been

chased by loose dogs. There are also health risks. When young children are walking in cold and rainy conditions, they get sick. We also have a lot of students that suffer from chronic illnesses, like asthma, that make walking more difficult and potentially dangerous for those students.

Attendance and Academic Performance

Aside from the health and safety of our students, our goal is to provide students with an excellent education and support so they will be successful in future academics. I fear that the lack of busing is holding us back from achieving those crucial goals. I believe this for a few reasons.

A comparison with another elementary school that has busing offers an interesting insight. It isn't a perfect comparison, but tells us a lot. W.L. Henry and Eastwood Elementary have some important similarities. They have a large majority of Latino students, with a majority of the students categorized as English Language Learners. Many of our students are mobile, meaning their homes are not steady. Both are identified by the Federal government as among the most impoverished schools. The big difference is that Eastwood has busing and W.L. Henry does not.

We have noticed that Eastwood's attendance figures are better than ours. We have more cases of chronic absenteeism, even though Eastwood is significantly larger. Eastwood had about 150 less students in the 2015-2016 school year, but W. L. Henry had 8 MORE cases of chronic absenteeism. We have lower regular attendance rates. I believe the lack of busing is certainly an influencing factor. We know kids are falling through the cracks, and this is another reason.

We are writing to you because we care so deeply about these kids. I can tell you that the lack of busing has had a negative impact on student achievement. I know you as a committee are concerned with the achievement gap in Oregon schools. That gap starts now, it starts early, and it is starting at W.L. Henry.

Sincerely,
Marianna Roman
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