

February 3rd 2017

Hello Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee,

W.L. Henry Elementary School, in the Hillsboro School District, lost its busing in the 2010-2011 School Year. Since that time, we (parents) have organized and lobbied the district to get busing back. We have been unsuccessful because all of our children live within one mile of the school and the district does not have additional funds. We wanted to bring this issue to your attention because we believe the lack of busing is dangerous, and it is holding our children back.

Before writing this letter, we as parents have met to discuss this issue. We've met over multiple years, and we have met often. We have worked with Rep. Susan McLain on this issue and are thankful for the Committee's time. Below we will detail how a lack of busing is holding our children back. We know that there are issues surrounding the safety and health of our children. We know it is affecting their ability to attend school and their academic performance. We also know that the lack of busing has created an economic burden that our families feel.

Student Safety and Health

Since children are walking to school alone, even the youngest kindergarten students, we worry about their ability to appropriately walk to school. In the winter, it is dark, usually raining, and often foggy. Our streets lack sidewalks in some places and adequate street lights. Cars often go faster than the speed limit and do not follow pedestrian traffic laws. Some of the younger students do not know how to safely cross streets. While most students know to push the flashing crosswalk light, many cars choose not to stop. Residents of the area often fail to look for students when backing out of their driveways. There have been numerous reports of children almost being hit by a car, and parents and others that walk students to school have been hit by cars.

There are more safety concerns on the roads. We live in an area with some homeless people and people that are addicted to drugs. We also know that two registered sex offenders live in our neighborhood. We worry that younger children don't understand the risk of stranger danger. There have been separate reports of unknown adults approaching children or asking enter their vehicle or approach them. On top of the stranger issue, our children also find syringes, pornography, bottles with strange liquids, and other unsavory materials. There is also an issue with loose dogs in the neighborhood, the police have been called multiple times after aggressive dogs have scared children and parents.

Another important safety issue is our children's health. Kids at W.L. Henry face chronic health problems due to living conditions. We are a low income community and, with the rising cost of housing, are forced to live in apartments and houses that have mold problems. Many kids that go to W.L. Henry have chronic illnesses, like asthma, that make it more difficult for them to walk to school. Other students have issues with eyesight that limit their ability to walk to school.

Since Oregon is so rainy and cold in the winter, our children get sick frequently. When students are sick, they have to stay home and miss days of school. We struggle to afford appropriate winter clothing and sometimes our children get wet and cold on their 25-minute walk to school. They have to stay in those wet clothes, socks, and shoes all day. The school tries to help students change into warm and dry clothes, but they don't have

the resources to provide a change of clothes to every student. Because of the lack resources, our children get sick frequently and miss a lot of school.

Absenteeism and Academic Achievement

We were told that the Legislature has done a lot of work around chronic absenteeism. We see our busing issue as a cause of absenteeism at W.L. Henry. As we said earlier, our students get sick walking to school. Since many parents are at work and cannot walk their kids to school, some kids don't walk to school or arrive late because of the weather. We wish we could be there to ensure our kids get to school, but we have to be at work.

When our children arrive to school, they often arrive wet and cold. They stay in those clothes and must pay attention in school. Since they are cold and wet, they are not in the right mindset to learn. We have heard from teachers that our children are distracted when they are wet and cold, and that their distraction can affect the mood of the entire classroom. We know W.L. Henry is a low academic achieving school, and we know we could do better with more resources. I see busing as a resource that could help.

Barriers & Economic Hardship

We have already mentioned some barriers we face, like ability to afford appropriate winter clothing. That is far from the only barrier we face. There are parents that have left jobs to ensure their children get to school safely, and other miss hours of work to take their children to school. This creates an additional economic burden because we are low income families.

Some parents cannot miss work to walk or drive their child to school, and parents do not have access to a valid, legal driver's license. These parents must walk with their children, have their children walk alone, or pay a neighbor to drive their children to school. Other parents and neighbors charge parents to drive their children to school on a per child basis. On such limited income, this makes it harder for them to pay rent and other bills.

When parents and students do walk to school, they are exposed to the elements. As stated earlier, they are more likely to get sick. We face issues with healthcare affordability. Both parents and children need to go to the doctor more. There are a population of students that do not have health insurance, and most parents do not have health insurance. The cost of additional doctor visits is a huge burden for our families.

It is our hope that you consider this issue. While many schools have children walk a mile to school, our school is different. We are of lower income, many of us are migrants, and most of us speak Spanish in the home. We are grateful that our children benefit from the bilingual program at W. L. Henry, but we want to do more to help our children succeed.

Sincerely,
Parents of W.L. Henry Elementary School