

February 7, 2017

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee and others considering SB 183,

I am writing in support of SB 183 and urge the passage of this important piece of legislation.

I know that you and the rest of the Oregon Legislature face a very difficult task this session with a looming budget deficit and many needs to balance. I also know that with Oregon's graduation rate among the lowest in the nation and Oregon's chronic student absence rate one of the highest in the nation, the issues addressed through SB 183 are an urgent priority. Graduation from high school is essential to future life success like never before. Regular, punctual school attendance is a vital prerequisite to graduation. Nothing we do in schools is as important as getting students attending regularly because if they are not present, they cannot benefit from any of our other teaching/learning efforts.

The Oregonian recently reported *"Oregon's graduation rate of 74 percent for the class of 2015 was third-worst in the nation, trailing the national average by nearly 10 percentage points and beating only Nevada and New Mexico."* (Oregon Live. January 26, 2017) The article also describes what we know we need to do to address the issue. *"Schools and districts that achieved some of the best rates in the state credited similar approaches and techniques for their success. They carefully track student absences, behavior and grades and intervene quickly when trouble signs arise. They put a premium on establishing close and caring relationships with students. They help teachers get the skills they need to make lessons engaging to teens. They find workable ways to help students catch up when they fall behind in credits."*

I have been working extensively since 2002 with schools to help improve student attendance. School districts I have worked with have included larger districts such as Hillsboro, moderately-sized districts like Eagle Point and smaller districts such as Oakridge. A review of their efforts and the impact of their work is impressive and demonstrates the power of applying research-based strategies. Over my time working in this area, I have seen a strong surge of interest and national focus on this issue and consequently we now have a rich array of immediately accessible, well-researched tools and knowledge to improve student attendance and graduation rates. The recently completed, legislatively requested "Statewide Chronic Absenteeism Plan" (December, 2016) details that research and lays out a plan for statewide implementation. SB 183 makes the application of that plan a priority statewide.

I urge you to carefully review both the "Statewide Chronic Absenteeism Plan" and the contents of SB 183. For a relatively minor investment this state can access the above-noted

array of tools and strategies and, through focused application of available research, powerfully impact the lives of Oregon students by improving student attendance and graduation.

Again, I fully endorse SB 183 and urge its passage. This is a critical priority for our state. Please let me know if I can be of assistance in providing further testimony or explanation of the state's challenges in this area or of the tools and strategies available to address this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Perry', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Scott Perry

Former Superintendent, Southern Oregon ESD (2009-2015)  
Interim Superintendent, Multnomah ESD (2016)