



To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Nancy Willard, Director of Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

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Re: SB 180

As I stated in my oral testimony, I work in the field of bullying prevention, which necessarily incorporates other issues of trauma informed practices, effective discipline and the like. I was a “digital mouse in the corner” listening to the outcome of the Joint Interim Committee on Student Success. **You all are to be congratulated on the depth of the insight you gained in your journey through the state and for your efforts to move forward on strategies to better support the social and emotional well-being of Oregon’s young people. Thank you!**

Unfortunately, what I am seeing with all of the legislation in this area is a lack of an integrated approach. I have reached out to the state’s educational leaders to respectfully suggest some efforts to better integrate what is being presented to you. I do not know if my efforts will be successful.

With respect to SB 180, the other two bills to consider are SB 52 and HB 2224. All call for funding in one way or the other to better address the social and emotional well being of students in different amounts and in different ways. Based on language in the bills, I would advise that HB 2224 appears to present the best approach.

What is lacking in all of these bills is a focus on evaluation to ensure that the approaches that are implemented will have the highest likelihood of success.

With respect to the language in SB 180 specifically, there is a critically important concern. There are no proven approaches. Recent meta-analyses of bullying prevention programs have documented low to no positive impact—with zero effectiveness at the secondary level.¹ Programs that have no documentation of effectiveness -- or evidence that they have not been effective -- regularly tell schools that their program is effective.

The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program from the UO used to advertise on its site that PBIS is Bullying Prevention. They had no research to back this up. A recent study found that PBIS did not reduce student reports of being bullied.²

Susan Rieke Smith testified to you about a program Ophelia’s Place implemented in Springfield School District. I have the data from the Springfield district on the Student Wellness Survey from 2016 to 2018, when this program was implemented. This is attached. As you can see from the SWS data, there is evidence that the rate of bullying increased during the time of the implementation of this program.

I am not raising attention to this to blame Springfield School District or Ophelia’s Place. Rather, to suggest to you that it is IMPERATIVE to ensure the highest level of effectiveness in the programs that are implemented.

I recommend a critically important change to (3)(a)(B). This is a passage from my book, *Engage Students to Embrace Civility* that relates:

¹ Cohen, J., Espelage, D.L., Twemlow, S.W., Berkowitz, M.W. Comer, J.P. (2015) Rethinking Effective Bully and Violence Prevention Efforts: Promoting Healthy School Climates, Positive Youth Development, and Preventing Bully-Victim-Bystander Behavior. *International Journal of Violence and Schools*; Yeager, D.S., Fong, C.J., Lee, H.Y., and Espelage, D. (2015). Declines in Efficacy of Anti-Bullying Programs Among Older Adolescents: A Developmental Theory and a Three-Level Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. Volume 37, Pages 36–51.

² Gage, N.A., Rose, C.A., Kramer, D.A. (2018) When Prevention is Not Enough: Students’ Perception of Bullying and School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. *Behavioral Disorders*.

ESSA set forth four evidence levels to guide schools in selecting evidence-based programs and approaches that have a likelihood of success, including “Strong,” “Moderate,” “Promising,” and “Demonstrates a Rationale.”³

This guidance was provided by USDOE.⁴

Demonstrates a Rationale. *To demonstrate a rationale, the intervention should include:*

- 1) A well-specified logic model that is informed by research or an evaluation that suggests how the intervention is likely to improve relevant outcomes; and*
- 2) An effort to study the effects of the intervention, ideally producing promising evidence or higher, that will happen as part of the intervention or is underway elsewhere (e.g., this could mean another SEA, LEA, or research organization is studying the intervention elsewhere), to inform stakeholders about the success of that intervention.*

In an excellent article explaining the significant benefit of this category by the Brookings Institute, it was noted that the “evidentiary cupboard” is bare.⁵ This is the case in the area of bullying prevention. As noted it is not possible for any district or school to implement a practice in bullying prevention that has demonstrated effectiveness, because there are none.

The ESSA “Demonstrated a Rationale” category is exceptionally helpful and fully supports the concepts of continuous improvement by using approaches that have a likelihood of success, with a commitment to evaluation. As the Brookings Institute article noted:

Crucially, for many purposes the law also treats as evidence-based a fourth category comprising activities that have a research-based rationale but lack direct empirical support—provided, that is, that they are accompanied by “ongoing efforts to examine the effects” of the activity on important student outcomes. Those six words, if taken seriously and implemented with care, hold the potential to create and provide resources to sustain a new model for decision-making within state education agencies and school districts—a model that benefits students and taxpayers and, over time, enhances our knowledge of what works in education.

Thus, I recommend (3)(a)(B) be revised to state: Has a well-specified logic model that is informed by research that suggests how the program is likely to improve outcomes and includes an evaluation plan to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

I further suggest:

Amend Section 2. (1) to read: ... to support the safety of schools and social and emotional well-being of students related to trauma, student resilience, bullying, and youth empowerment.

(2) Eliminate this requirement or shift to language encouraging a partnership with a community organization. There may be many districts in regions of the state that have creative ideas they want to implement, but no relevant community organization to partner with.

Eliminate (3)(a)(C) as there may be highly effective approaches that may not include all of these components.

I declare that I do have a personal interest in this legislation. I have created a student empowerment program, Embrace Civility. I am developing a digital safety program for use in Bahrain that could readily be adapted to Oregon schools. I offer professional development services.

³ Section 8101(21)(A) of the ESEA.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education (2016) Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceusesinvestment.pdf>.

⁵ West, M. R. (2016) From evidence-based programs to an evidence-based system: Opportunities under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/from-evidence-based-programs-to-an-evidence-based-system-opportunities-under-the-every-student-succeeds-act/>.