



March 11, 2019

Testimony in support of the HB 2940 Ethnic Studies March 11th, 2019, Hearing Room F, 3:00 p.m. House Committee on Education

Chair Doherty, Vice Chairs Alonzo Leon, and Helt. Representatives Hernandez, Neron, Reardon, Reschke, Sollman, and Wallan:

For the record, I am Dr. Joseph Gallegos, professor and director of the Graduate Social Work Program for Pacific University. I am also a member and longtime supporter of the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs. I am here today in support for HB 2940 relating to the importance of school social workers to Oregon's success. HB 2940 will establish a pilot program for the purpose of increasing the number of public schools in which students who are served by school social workers are placed.

Why School Social Worker Positions are Needed: This bill will help all Oregon students succeed. Increasing the number of social workers in our schools will greatly enhance the probability of success of our marginalized students, whose numbers are increasing. Social workers are trained in cultural competence, trauma informed practice, intersectionality, and various mental health modalities. To understand why social workers can bring such a critical professional element to the education team is to understand the distinction between them and other support professionals. School psychologists primarily perform student testing and evaluations, while school counselors provide academic and career advice. Social workers provide a wrap-around spectrum of behavioral and emotional support and referral services that include a holistic family and community approach.

1976 Recession: Because of financial exigencies, as happened in many parts of the country, school social workers were "declassified" in Oregon in the 1980's. They were replaced in the schools by behavior management specialists, who could be social workers, psychologists, or any other "mental-health" degree individual, and, since then, an assortment of intervention-type professionals have found a presence in Oregon schools. In 2009 a bill was introduced in the Oregon legislature to certify school social workers for K-12 positions, and the Office of Teacher Standards and Practices (TSPC) authorized licensing of school social workers and established a course requirement for certification for these people. The Portland State University School Social Work Track web site states that "The license enhances your opportunities to pursue jobs in k-12 positions." Currently, school districts may hire school social workers, but there is no requirement to do so. School social workers interviewed for this effort reported the school

district practice is to hire one or two social workers to cover several schools and that the few social workers who do work in Oregon schools are spread too thin to be optimally effective.

Return on Investment: It is common knowledge that completing high school is a guarantee of a higher wage than those students not completing high school. It also means a higher probability of entering community college or a trade training program or even progressing to four-year college completion. These educational accomplishments are vital to our state's future workforce development. In addition, a more highly-educated workforce means higher incomes and that means higher taxes paid to the state to support needed services. In the long run, this successful workforce will more than compensate for the investment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Gallegos", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Joseph Gallegos, MSW, PhD.

Director, Graduate Social Work Program
Pacific University—Eugene Campus