



To: House Education Committee
From: Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D.
Re: HB 2224

HB2224 should be considered a high priority for passage and full funding. Alternatively, you should plan for a massive increase in funding for juvenile corrections in the very near future, followed by a massive increase in adult corrections. Recognize that if you fail to provide sufficient funding for our schools, and especially for programs to meet the mental health needs of Oregon's youth, you will be causing disruptions in our society for decades to come.

The Confederation of Oregon School Administrators should be credited for its leadership efforts in pulling together an excellent group of school and mental health leaders and crafting an excellent plan of action.

Oregon's young people are facing an epidemic of mental health concerns. This is especially evident in the younger grades. The extent of these concerns has been well documented in the Oregon Education Association report *A Crisis of Disrupted Learning*:

Our schools are in crisis all across the state. Students come to school with intense unmet needs that impact their learning at school – such as hunger, homelessness, unmet mental health needs, and traumatic events at home. Without adequate resources to support our students, these challenges result in frequent, severe disruptions and outbursts that take time away from learning and affect all of our students. (<https://www.oregoned.org/whats-new/a-crisis-of-disrupted-learning>)

This crisis is also quite evident in selected data from the Oregon Healthy Teens Survey that is set forth on the next pages. I selected the 2013 and 2017 years to show you the stark and frightening increase in concerns. The year 2013 was selected because this is when the data started showing a significant increase. Please consider this year in the context of what else was happening in our schools.

There are, however, additional concerns we need to address regarding the challenges impacting our youth. The OEA report focused on concerns they consider coming from the home. These are indeed significant concerns. However, there are other concerns that are directly related to what is happening in school:

- Certainly the failure of the Oregon state government to provide anywhere close to adequate funding for our schools, resulting in massive class sizes, is a huge part of the problem. Will the state legislature finally have the courage to tell the Oregon business lobby and out-of-state corporations and the wealthy that they are expected to pay more?

- A recent study by Pew Research Center demonstrated that academic pressures were at the top of the list in causing their anxiety -- far over all other pressures. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/>. Note that the significant increase in teen emotional concerns coincided with the introduction of the Common Core and Smarter Balance test. The quest to improve student achievement by maintaining a focus on test scores has clearly failed. At what point do we admit this has failed or are we going to continue to do the same thing over and over and somehow expect that sometime in the future something good might benefit?
- The rates of bullying and harassment have not declined -- and appear to be increasing. This is despite the fact that Oregon, and other states, have had bullying prevention laws on the books for over a decade. Being bullied has been clearly associated with long lasting mental health concerns, school failure and avoidance, increased suicide risk, and involvement in school violence. Perhaps should there be a reconsideration of the manner in which schools have been directed by statute to address these concerns?
- When the Common Core was introduced, the early childhood educators were uniformly against its standards because they noted that they were totally out of accord with developmental understandings of this age group. Given the massive concerns at the elementary school level, should we not be considering whether what we are forcing students to do might not be developmentally appropriate and part of the problem?

The bottom line is that there are profoundly serious concerns about the emotional well-being of our youth. HM 2224 is a start. It certainly is not a comprehensive cure.

Oregon Healthy Teens Survey

2013

2017

Table 15: Would you say that in general your emotional and mental health is...

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
Excellent	22.0	19.2
Very good	33.3	31.9
Good	28.3	30.1
Fair	12.2	14.2
Poor	4.3	4.7

Table 18: Would you say that in general your emotional and mental health is...

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
Excellent	19.0	13.5
Very good	28.1	23.5
Good	27.9	29.3
Fair	16.7	21.8
Poor	8.4	12.0

Table 18: During the past 12 months, did you have any emotional or mental health care needs that were not met? (Count any situation where you thought you should see a counselor, social worker, or other mental health professional.)

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
Yes	14.4	15.2
No	85.6	84.8

Table 25: During the past 12 months, did you have any emotional or mental health care needs that were not met? (Count any situation where you thought you should see a counselor, social worker, or other mental health professional.)

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
Yes	18.7	22.4
No	81.3	77.6

Table 68: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
Yes	25.6	27.0
No	74.4	73.0

Percentages exclude missing answers.

Table 69: During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
Yes	16.1	14.5
No	83.9	85.5

Table 70: During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
0 times	92.1	95.1
1 time	4.0	2.7
2 or 3 times	2.6	1.6
4 or 5 times	0.7	0.2
6 or more times	0.6	0.4

Table 72: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
Yes	30.1	32.2
No	69.9	67.8

Percentages exclude missing answers.

Table 73: During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
Yes	16.9	18.2
No	83.1	81.8

Table 74: During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?

	Grade 8 State %	Grade 11 State %
0 times	91.3	93.2
1 time	4.5	3.6
2 or 3 times	2.7	2.4
4 or 5 times	0.5	0.4
6 or more times	1.0	0.4