

A Crisis of Disrupted Learning



Conditions in Our Schools and
Recommended Solutions

Oregon Education Association



Introduction

Over the past three years, OEA members have shared more and more stories about extreme behaviors in Oregon schools. These behaviors have made classrooms feel unsafe for students and educators, and everyone is feeling their impact. Student needs are going unmet and educators have very real concerns about whether they can provide safe, welcoming and inclusive learning environments for all with the resources they have.

Educators' stories bear witness to the complicated challenges students face as well as educators' deep concerns and desire to help their students be successful. It is clear that Oregon students and classrooms are in crisis. Students are coming to school with complex needs, students and educators don't feel safe, and schools and districts don't have the resources to address the root causes of these incidents. Without appropriate resources to support communities, students are biting, kicking, punching. Young children are cursing, yelling, screaming. Innocent objects are turned into dangerous weapons. And without additional investment in schools, families, educators, and school leaders can only apply small Band-Aids and hope for the best.

OEA began exploring the depths of this crisis through an internal Special Education Task Force, which quickly found disrupted learning environments affected all classrooms and students across all grade levels. Then, OEA members and leadership testified to the State Board of Education in November 2017. They pleaded for help with board members – help for themselves, help for their classrooms, and mostly, help for students desperately crying out for resources and support in the only way they knew how. Based on OEA's work, Governor Kate Brown created a task force to explore issues of dis-

rupted learning. OEA leaders began conversations with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and launched an ambitious plan to hold community forums around the state to hear from educators about their experiences and their ideas. Questions central to this work: How can we support students? What can be done to ensure safe, welcoming and inclusive classrooms for all? How do we mend a broken system that has created so much need?

Students and educators should feel safe and secure while at school. **The disrupted learning environment crisis puts these core values at risk.**



The Oregon Education Association believes that each and every student in Oregon deserves a quality public education. Educators around the state are deeply committed to the success of all students, no matter the challenges they face in and out of school. Classrooms should be dynamic environments full of curiosity, imagination, and deep learning. Students and educators should feel safe and secure while at school. The disrupted learning environment crisis puts these core values at risk.

This report is an overview of the current realities that educators and students are experiencing, as well as the resource needs and innovative ideas that will move Oregon toward meeting everyone’s needs. Positive learning environments where students, educators and families thrive are achievable. There is no one quick-fix, no one-size-fits-all program, and no single solution or program that can solve this growing crisis. And clearly, the education profession cannot do this alone. The effects of poverty and trauma on families, students, and the community at large is a greater societal concern that calls for a multi-pronged solution to address housing, food insecurity, workforce challenges, and access to healthcare, including mental health services.

This report complements other statewide efforts to examine the growing challenges in the state, specifically ODE’s *Safe and Effective Schools for ALL Students Advisory Committee*, the Oregon Legislature’s Joint Interim Committee on Student Success, and the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators’ Social Determinants of Health and Education Workgroup. Uniquely, this report contains extensive input from more than 2,000 Oregon educators working in classrooms across the state. Their feedback paints a clear picture of the support classrooms desperately need.

Community Forums

Responding to educators’ concerns, OEA held a series of 14 community forums across the state in 2018. Educators, parents, and community leaders were invited together to share information, hear local experiences, and solicit ideas for addressing this challenging issue.

Participation was widespread. Across the 14 forums, nearly 700 people attended: teachers, administrators, education support professionals (ESPs)¹, families, Oregon legislators, and community members. Using a set of four open-ended questions, participants were led by OEA President John Larson, OEA Vice President Reed Scott-Schwalbach and OEA staff members in both whole group and small table

FORUM LOCATIONS	
Spring 2018	Fall 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Albany ▪ SE Portland ▪ OEA Rep. Assembly ▪ Klamath Falls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Astoria ▪ Beaverton/Hillsboro ▪ Bend/Redmond ▪ Coos Bay ▪ Corvallis ▪ The Dalles ▪ Eugene ▪ Hermiston ▪ Medford ▪ Salem

FORUM AND SURVEY QUESTIONS

- 1 *In your classroom, school, or district, what are barriers to ensuring all students can learn in a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment?*
- 2 *What changes could be made to overcome those barriers in your classroom, school, or district?*
- 3 *What support do you need or does your classroom, school or district need to implement those ideas?*
- 4 *What innovations or success do you know about that could inform changes across Oregon?*

discussions. An online survey provided another opportunity to engage on the topic: 1,137 respondents representing 112 of the 197 Oregon school districts provided their input through the survey.

Oregon policymakers also participated in the forums: the Office of the Governor, Oregon Department of Education, and the Chief Education Office were represented. This included Colt Gill, Director of the Oregon Department of Education, Chief Education Officer Lindsey Capps, and various ODE staff members. They listened, participated in group discussions, and shared information about other statewide efforts to improve learning environments.

What OEA has learned from the high level of engagement in this process and its results is that the crisis of disrupted learning environments is not limited in its scope. It affects urban, suburban, town, and rural classrooms. It affects southern and eastern Oregon as well as the Willamette Valley and the coast. It is a statewide issue, one that has risen to the forefront in the minds of many administrators, educators, and families. Oregonians want to – and can – solve it.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected in three ways. First, note-takers at the forums captured whole group and table discussions and individuals were invited to submit their own notes (see questions on the adjacent page). Second, a Poll Everywhere survey – in which participants respond to close-ended questions using an internet connection via phone or other device – was used at 10 of the 14 forums. Third, a link to an online survey that asked the same four open-ended questions used in the forum discussions was sent to educators three times: before their regional forum, after their regional forum, and coinciding with the last of the 14 forums. The survey closed on November 21, 2018.

All data were analyzed by an external evaluator. The qualitative data – the responses to the four open-ended questions – were analyzed using content analysis, a method that involves repeated readings of responses, first identifying key themes and then coding how often those themes show up. The poll data were averaged for each forum, and then across forums.

“The decision-makers need to understand that this is urgent – that the trauma it causes to others (teachers and students) is serious and real.”



Report Summary

This report synthesizes the extensive data into descriptions of the issue, how it affects those it touches, and recommendations for addressing it. The report uses educators' own words to describe the problem. Key recommendations from OEA are outlined to address different aspects of the crisis. Each recommendation is deeply grounded in the data collected from members. When appropriate, members' data is contextualized with information about Oregon's education landscape.

The report highlights three crucial areas for immediate action that OEA believes will have the greatest impact upon this crisis. Under each area, OEA outlines actions to take at the school, school district, and state level. Additionally, the report elevates seven additional areas where changes will benefit students.

¹ The term education support professionals used in this report includes eight K-12 job categories: clerical services, custodial and maintenance, food service, health and student services, paraeducators, security services, skilled trades, technical services and transportation.

Understanding the Crisis

What is a disrupted learning environment?

Disrupted learning environments occur when student behavior significantly interferes with instruction and/or school staff members' ability to maintain a stable classroom or ensure student safety. At times, extreme student behavior can become dangerous to themselves or the classroom as a whole. These incidents can often result in clearing a classroom of students to ensure everyone's safety, physical restraint of a student, or other intensive interventions.

In their discussions and written responses, educators described student behavior that has increasingly made it challenging to provide safe, welcoming and inclusive learning environments conducive to high-quality instruction. These behaviors included:

- ▶ Verbal abuse: screaming, threatening, name-calling, using profanity
- ▶ Person to person abuse: spitting, kicking, hitting
- ▶ Weaponizing the classroom: overturning furniture, brandishing scissors or other items, stabbing with pencils, throwing objects
- ▶ Destruction of property: intentionally ruining other students' projects, throwing technology, ripping books and other paper materials, tearing materials off walls

Students and educators feel the ongoing impact of these extreme behaviors. Educators spoke of an atmosphere of "violence" that was "palpable," of "attacks" that came regularly, and of the "trauma" students experience in that environment – both students

exhibiting the behavior and students witnessing the behavior. These descriptions came from educators across the state, from every forum and every region.

Why do disrupted learning environments occur?

One participant put the answer to this question in a nutshell: "more problems and less support." Educators named several causes of this increase in disruptive behaviors. First and foremost, and perhaps most impactful, is the chronic and systemic disinvestment in Oregon schools.²

Other factors include:

- ▶ Increased class sizes
- ▶ Decreased student support specialists including special education teachers, educational assistants, counselors, and others
- ▶ Students with high needs or special education needs but no resources to support those needs
- ▶ A marked decrease in well-rounded education opportunities and time for physical activity and play, including PE and recess
- ▶ A lack of appropriate training for educators
- ▶ Unclear implementation of policies regarding restraint and seclusion, K-5 expulsion and suspension, and school-/district-specific protocols in the event of disruptions

Class size tops this list as a contributing factor to disrupted learning environments. Educators described class sizes of over 30 students often with no additional support or only limited support from

² Oregon Quality Education Commission. (2018). *Oregon Quality Education Model Final Report 2018*. Salem, OR: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/taskcomm/Documents/QEMReports/2018QEMReport.pdf>.

³ Oregon Department of Education. (2018) *Class Roster Collection*. Available from <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/Pages/Class-Size-Report.aspx>.

⁴ National Education Association. (2008). *Class Size Reduction: A Proven Reform Strategy*. Washington, DC: Author. Available from http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB08_ClassSize08.pdf.



educational assistants. Oregon's annual class size report verifies this reality. Nearly 45% of all reported classes have class sizes of 26 students or more, with some classes as large as 56 or more.³ The influential Tennessee Project STAR recommends class sizes of no more than 18 or no more than 26 with a teacher and educational assistant to produce the greatest benefit for students.⁴

Educators describe how overcrowding and cramped classroom conditions make it difficult to maintain a calm environment conducive to learning. Many schools also have reduced non-classroom teaching positions including counseling staff, special education teachers, school psychologists, school nurses and other specialized support personnel. Most schools have limited well-rounded educational opportunities that engage students including music and fine arts, library services, physical education, career technical education offerings, and other electives.

Many educators also note that more students are coming to school with substantial social and emotional needs, physical health needs, and mental health challenges. These intense unmet needs (such as hunger, homelessness, and traumatic events at home) affect students' ability to learn. When students come to school exhausted and stressed because they don't have a stable place to call home or know where weekend meals will come from, they aren't ready to learn fractions or write an essay. These emergency needs take precedence over academic work in students' lives and they need additional support to be successful. Some, but not all, of these challenges are linked to trauma, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and the effects of poverty, such as housing and/or food insecurity.

These are some of the root causes educators cited as potential causes of the increase in disrupted learning environments. As with any issue, there are

likely other contributing factors we are not yet aware of or factors specific to certain contexts.

How common are these events?

Educators have reported a noticeable increase in disrupted learning environments across the state over the last several years. This increase, however, is difficult to quantify. The state doesn't require school districts to keep formal data on incidents like room clears or less intensive interventions so the scope of the crisis isn't fully known. Schools and districts do have to report on student and educator injuries, use of restraint, and suspensions and expulsions as required by state statute. All three of those outcomes are the most extreme result of behavior. Other responses to a disrupted learning environment generally go unrecorded.

Educators and students are reporting that they feel unsafe. A third of poll respondents (32%) said they

were scared for students' safety at school because of this issue, and a quarter (25%) said they were concerned about their own safety. Anecdotally, educators, principals, superintendents, school board members and families have reported weekly and even daily room clears as becoming commonplace.

More than half of poll respondents (56%) said that their classroom or their child's classroom had experienced at least one room clear this year. Room clears are emergency procedures in which students temporarily leave a classroom to reduce the likelihood of injury or trauma as a result of extreme behavior, and often occur when one student is exhibiting behaviors that put the classroom at risk of harm. Room clears have been adopted by schools as a last resort option for managing extreme behavior situations. Because schools implemented them in a piecemeal fashion, there is no one legal definition or prescribed protocol, and thus no standard reporting mechanism yet.



Additionally, the Oregon TELL survey⁵ (a bi-annual survey to assess teaching conditions) reflects that educators feel less safe in their school environment now than they did in 2014. In 2014, 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the faculty work in a school environment that is safe. In 2018, that dropped to 82%. The Oregon TELL survey is administered by a coalition that includes OEA, the Oregon Department of Education, the Confederation of School Administrators, the Oregon School Boards Association, the Chief Education Office, and the Oregon Association of Education Service Districts.

How do disruptions affect students, educators, and families?

Disruptions have a negative impact on everyone involved: students exhibiting extreme behavior, students witnessing extreme behavior, educators, and families. Participants widely said that their schools did not effectively and holistically address disrupted learning. In fact, 91% of poll respondents reported that their school lacked adequate resources to provide safe, welcoming, and inclusive classrooms.

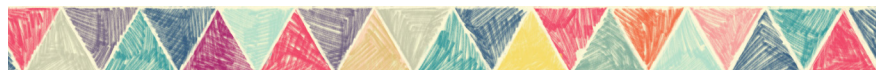
Impact on students

Students exhibiting extreme behavior and students witnessing extreme behavior both suffer when schools cannot provide the supports needed. First, students exhibiting extreme behavior are not getting the supports they need. Educators feel discouraged that often the only intervention available is for students is to be removed from class and “babysat” in an office, rather than addressing their unmet needs or receiving tools to learn to manage their behavior. Schools often only react to disruptive events rather than put proactive strategies into place due to reduced resources and staff supports. Many educators lamented the lack

of “consequences” or “accountability” as part of the continuum of supports, interventions, and tools available to help students. Others advocated for students’ glaring needs to be addressed rather than “band-aided.” Meanwhile, when students are removed from class they miss out academically. They can also experience social isolation and emotional trauma as a result of how peers treat them in the aftermath of disruptive events, which affects student achievement.⁶ Some students have even been hurt physically as a result of their behavior.

The impact on students witnessing extreme behavior is also real and tangible. First is the loss of valuable instructional time, already in short supply. Oregon has one of the shortest school years in the nation.⁷ Students are unable to learn when there are regular and dramatic interruptions in the school day, when they have to leave their classrooms, and when they do not feel safe. Students are also witnessing and ex-

“There is not a reliable, timely, or effective system in place to intervene when there are consistent disruptions. It feels like a Band-Aid approach.”



periencing chaotic, sometimes violent situations as a result of these disruptions. Some students have been physically injured. Many respondents expressed deep concerns about how students were traumatized by exposure to repeated disruptions and how behavioral outbursts were being normalized. Without increased support, all students will continue to suffer.

⁵ Oregon Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning survey. (2018) *Oregon summary comparison data*. Available from <https://telloregon.org/results/report/609/172614>

⁶ Willms, J. D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation: Results from PISA 2000*. Paris, France: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/programmefointernationalstudentassessmentpisa/33689437.pdf>.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Table 5.14. Number of instructional days and hours in the school year, by state: 2018*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/tab5_14.asp.

Historically, students with disabilities, students of color, and historically underserved students have been disproportionately impacted by these events. They face higher suspension and expulsion rates, have lower graduation rates, and are restrained more frequently. Oregon must reduce disproportional discipline, ensure all students receive support, and continue to collect data on proportionality.

Educators

Educators are negatively affected by disruptions and extremely distressed about their capacity to handle them. They describe the repeated loss of instructional time, the urgency of protecting all children, the psychological toll of experiencing student verbal and physical abuse, often repeatedly, and frustration with a perceived lack of support for addressing and changing student behavior and supporting student needs. Educators expressed feelings of futility and defeat, saying, “I wish we knew what to do.”

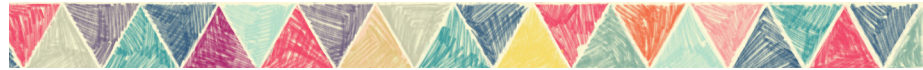
The toll of this secondary traumatic stress (often referred to as compassion fatigue) educators experience is causing some to consider leaving the profession at a time when Oregon already faces a shortage of experienced educators. Other educators have been seriously injured and have had to take short or long-term medical leaves. Others have sought mental health support, or have resorted to wearing protective gear such as bite sleeves or Kevlar equipment to prevent injury. This impact is felt by all adults who work in schools including Education Support Professionals. These professionals, often referred to as classified staff in Oregon, include clerical staff, bus drivers, nutrition workers, maintenance staff, security personnel and instructional assistants.

Community

Finally, there is an impact on the wider community – including but not limited to students’ families. These events and the inability of schools to respond to them effectively can lead to or exacerbate existing distrust

between educators and families. In turn, this erodes family engagement in the school, which can already be a challenge. It can unintentionally undermine community partnerships, which are an essential part of solving this problem. Further, the perception that schools are dangerous places has been taking root in our culture over the past two decades. Disruptions add to that narrative, particularly in light of chronic, systematic disinvestment in our education system.

“I have students standing on desks, screaming in class, getting in fist fights, harming themselves, swearing and running out of the classroom - and this is all at the elementary level.”



“Frequent outbursts impact classroom learning and teaching on a daily basis. We feel useless in how we can address it.”

What can be done to effectively address and prevent disrupted learning environments?

OEA recommends key actions in these areas at three levels of decision making:

- The school level with actions led by school staff, educators, school leaders, families, and students
- The district level with actions led by district leadership, educators, and the school board
- And the state level with actions led by state education agencies and lawmakers

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OEA Recommendations

Take action in three key areas

Across the feedback from educators, families, and community members, three key action areas rose to the forefront. None of them are easy fixes, and all require funding and systemic changes to education. However, these areas are clearly what those who are grounded in the day-to-day reality of classrooms – Oregon educators – believe will provide lasting improvements to the growing crisis of disrupted learning environments.

1. Increase onsite student supports with a focus on mental health

Oregon schools need more supports for addressing student mental health and social and emotional needs. These supports should be provided first, and most importantly, onsite in school buildings, and then secondarily through community partnerships.

The growing mental health and social and emotional needs of students are overwhelming to educators and school staff. Schools are struggling to “fill the gap” for students who lack access to much-needed supports. Existing counseling staff are spread incredibly thin and often must attend to other aspects of their job duties such as testing, scheduling, or career and college counseling rather than supporting students’ mental health and emotional well-being.

Educators are desperate for more such staff onsite and a continuum of supports that are targeted to student and school needs. Additional support staff that schools need onsite or through partnership include:

- ▶ Mental health counselors (with education and experience in psychology or counseling)
- ▶ School psychologists
- ▶ Behavior specialists
- ▶ Social workers
- ▶ School nurses

- ▶ Speech language pathologists
- ▶ Occupational and physical therapists
- ▶ Other staff with expertise in mental health, behavior, and trauma

These staff can provide ongoing supports for students as well as outside referrals when needed.

Access to additional support services can also be developed through connections to providers and programs in the community. This includes bringing resources from the community (such as mental health providers, medical providers, food/shelter programs, and other programs to address the effects of poverty) into the school or co-locating the services at the school. It also can mean having a staff person who connects students and families to services and supports in the community.

One manifestation of this type of connection is “wraparound care,” a highly lauded approach in which a team of the individuals and agencies who provide services to a child or youth engage in a defined and collaborative planning process to develop a support network for the student and their family. This approach could be particularly beneficial in rural areas, in which it can be difficult to recruit full-time trained mental health and other support staff.

Key Actions

SCHOOL:

- Utilize school-based student intervention teams based on best practices that include appropriate school personnel to work proactively to reduce extreme behavior.
- Provide time for school staff (counselors, classroom teachers, education assistants, and others as appropriate) to co-plan and co-teach lessons and strategies on social and emotional learning, anti-bullying, inclusivity, self-regulation, mindfulness and other proactive approaches. These should include whole class, small group, and individual instruction formats.
- Develop community and family engagement plans and programs that include social workers and other mental health professionals.

DISTRICT:

- Recruit and retain highly qualified personnel with expertise and education in mental health, with a focus on hiring personnel that reflect the diversity of students and the community at large.
- Build community resource partnerships that include school-based food programs, mental health resources, school wellness centers, and that use a community school model.
- Utilize a district-based wrap-around model grounded in best practices and with a goal of providing a system of timely supports to schools and students. This should also include strong district policies to prevent bullying and to promote inclusivity.

STATE:

- Support policies that encourage co-location of social services at schools to support students and families.
- Increase funding for hiring additional school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and school nurses to the nationally recommended ratio levels.
- Add an indicator of social and emotional learning and/or school climate to the state school accountability framework.



2. Reduce class sizes and caseloads

OEA recommends reducing class sizes. Closely aligned with this recommendation is appropriate caseloads for specialized instructional support personnel including special education teachers, school psychologists, counselors, and social workers.

Educators described extremely large class sizes at all levels. Oregon's most recent class size report documented 579 classes with 56 or more students and 40% of classes are 35% to 51% larger than the research recommends.⁸ Large class sizes mean that students do not receive the individualized attention and support that they need. Additionally, large class sizes make it more difficult for educators to implement high quality, evidence-based instructional strategies. Overcrowding also creates an atmosphere that can feel chaotic, overwhelming, or unsupportive and could potentially contribute to disruptive events.

Additional adult support from qualified educational assistants to support individual students, help de-escalate a behavior before it becomes a crisis, prevent bullying, or provide one-on-one or small group instruction can also help.

However, many of these positions have been eliminated due to decades of disinvestment in Oregon's education system. Another recommendation would be to follow the Tennessee Project STAR recommended best

practice of providing a full-time educational assistant in classes with more than 22 students.⁹

Non-classroom specialized instructional support personnel must also have manageable caseloads. High caseloads mean that counselors must make difficult decisions about who to serve and/or what functions of their job are most important. The National Association of School Psychologists¹⁰ and the National Association of School Nurses¹¹ recommends caseloads as follows:

- ▶ 250:1 for school counselors
- ▶ 500-700:1 for school psychologists
- ▶ 400:1 for social workers
- ▶ 750:1 for school nurses (in the healthy student population; higher for more complex needs)

“Smaller class sizes would go a LONG way toward helping to reduce class disruptions and would allow instructors more time to meet student needs and respond more effectively to individualized learning and education plans.”



The Oregon Quality Education Model has adopted these recommended caseloads¹².

Even lower caseload ratios are warranted when students have specialized needs. Current caseload data in Oregon is difficult to quantify as Oregon currently only requires school districts to report class size

in core subject areas. Anecdotally, many schools and districts have ratios that greatly surpass these recommended levels.

⁸ Oregon Department of Education. (2018) *Class Roster Collection*. Available from <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/Pages/Class-Size-Report.aspx>.

⁹ National Education Association. (2008). *Class Size Reduction: A Proven Reform Strategy*. Washington, DC: Author. Available from http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB08_ClassSize08.pdf.

¹⁰ National Association of School Psychologists. (2013). *NASP Recommendations for Comprehensive School Safety Policies*. Bethesda, MD: Author.

¹¹ National Association of School Nurses. (2015). *School nurse workload: Staffing for safe care* (Position Statement). Silver Spring, MD: Author.

¹² Oregon Quality Education Commission. (2018). Salem, OR: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/taskcomm/Documents/QEMReports/2018QEMReport.pdf>.

Key Actions

SCHOOL:

- Use a collaborative school approach to classroom teacher allocation across content and/or grade levels and in creating class rosters that includes the professional input of educators, assistants, and support personnel.
- Use a student-centered approach to developing class rosters that takes into account a classroom profile, existing needs, and available supports.
- Assign caseloads to specialized instructional support personnel that consider individual student needs and human capacity.

DISTRICT:

- Allocate district resources in a way that recognizes variations between schools and changes in classroom and school needs on an ongoing basis.
- In collaboration with educators, develop a clear definition of caseload to ensure appropriate staffing and student support.
- Allow for flexible class configuration policies that encourage innovative approaches to managing class sizes and class rosters.

STATE:

- Include caseload and class size as mandatory subjects of collective bargaining.
- Provide funding to implement the Oregon Quality Education Model recommendations for staffing levels of prototype schools and additional funding for school psychologists, social workers and school nurses.
- Add caseload data to Oregon's statutory class size report.



3. Fully fund targeted professional development and ongoing supports for consistent, high-quality implementation

To effectively address disrupted learning environments, school staff need high-quality professional development in programs, practices, policies and procedures that address the behavior and the myriad root causes of disrupted learning environments. This might include an underpinning model of behavior management. The models most often recommended by forum and survey respondents were:

- ▶ Trauma-informed practices, principles of trauma-sensitive schools, and using the Adverse Childhood Experiences survey (ACEs)
- ▶ Social and emotional learning programs
- ▶ Positive behavior programs including de-escalation skills and strategies
- ▶ Restorative justice and discipline, restorative or community circles
- ▶ Mindfulness approaches and instruction

Regardless of the program or practice, quality and consistency of implementation matters immensely. Staff need ongoing supports to fully transfer new knowledge into practice. The benefits and importance of consistent and ongoing professional development over one-time trainings is well documented in research throughout the education field. Additionally, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act defines high-quality professional development as *collaborative, on-going, job-embedded, and student-centered*. Educators also requested that professional development be:

- ▶ *Targeted* to the needs of the district and school
- ▶ *Extended* in its reach to include all staff (including administrators, classroom teachers, specialized support personnel, and all classifications of education support professionals)
- ▶ *Supported* with adequate time and ongoing refreshers
- ▶ Developed with the extensive *participation and leadership* of educators

School districts with more resources may have already adopted specific models or program. These districts may need to more finely tune implementation and ensure consistency across all staff. Districts with fewer resources will need access to additional support, which could include collaboration with other school districts, to develop districtwide plans. Notably, OEA does not believe the state should dictate specific content for professional learning. Rather, the state should support systems of learning that allow local schools and districts to identify learning content based on their identified needs.

“[We have] inadequate training for new curriculum ... Teachers in my school are expected to be doing restorative practices/circles regularly in our classrooms; however, not one hour of training has been given so that teachers do this in a truly inclusive and helpful way.”

Additionally, schools and districts need to adopt clear and transparent policies and procedures for educators to follow when disruptive learning environments occur. This should include procedures for documenting events; communicating with appropriate stakeholders; and appropriate follow up actions such as functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention or safety plans, and/or escalating consequences. The next step is therefore for educators to receive ongoing professional development on these policies and procedures so that they are widely understood and used by all school personnel. Finally, schools and districts should engage in a continuous improvement process to regularly review these policies and procedures in order to make necessary and regular adjustments.

Key Actions:

SCHOOL:

- Create schedules that allow for regular and quality collaboration among classroom teachers, and classroom teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, and education support professionals.
- Employ proven collaborative professional learning designs grounded in adult learning theory, such as peer observation, lesson study, instructional coaching and others, rather than one-time training experiences.
- Implement best practices for professional learning communities that provide educators with autonomy to identify their own learning needs based on current student data.

DISTRICT:

- Allocate resources to include all school staff including education support professionals in high quality professional learning.
- Convene collaborative district professional development committees that include representatives from all employee classifications to develop, implement, and evaluate, a professional learning vision and plan.
- Develop clear, consistent and transparent policies and procedures for discipline, restraint, and managing extreme student behavior. Regularly communicate these policies with school staff, families, and students.

STATE:

- Allocate sufficient resources for high-quality implementation of professional learning at a local level including time within the school day for educators to collaborate.
- Value professional learning on social and emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, de-escalation strategies and other behavior system learning as much as learning related to content.
- Adopt and utilize the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning at a state level.



OEA Recommendations

Make additional changes to support students, educators and families

Beyond the top three recommended areas for improvement, OEA recommends additional actions to establish safe, welcoming and inclusive learning environments.

Family wraparound services

Raising children is difficult even when families have access to adequate financial resources, food, and housing, when English is their first language, when there are no severe mental health issues, and when there is no history of trauma. It becomes even more difficult when one or more of these factors changes. For these reasons, many respondents felt that parent and family education was a missing link in attempting to meet students' needs. This content could be explicitly focused on parenting, developing social and emotional skills, or communicating about the school's behavior and discipline model.

Additionally, schools can help coordinate or provide a range of wraparound services to support families'

various needs that can impact student behavior. This should include a range of social services and programs that promote family engagement in the school.

Key Actions:

- Co-locate human and social services at schools including housing assistance, food programs, job-training, or language services.
- Utilize community school models that include family engagement opportunities such as parenting classes, English classes, and other activities that encourage and promote family participation and leadership in the school.
- Clear and consistent communication of school and district policies and procedures.

“Our district has a social worker, free breakfast and lunch, a clothes closet, outside providers, and social/emotional groups at our schools.”



Early education, identification, and support

The earlier that students can receive necessary support, the more successful they can be in school and beyond. There is a clear need for early education, student identification, and appropriate support for students in three key areas:

- ▶ Students' social and emotional readiness for kindergarten
- ▶ Early identification for special education
- ▶ And early identification for behavior that does not qualify for special education but requires additional support

“We need more mental health professionals. Our school psychologist serves 1200 students. We need more trauma-informed help. Our counselors are turning into first responders.”

Specifically, these efforts should be focused on in early childhood programs and the primary grades in elementary school. Any efforts should not result in a disproportional identification of historically underserved students for special education.

Additionally, educators reported that when students had access to high-quality preschool and early education programs, they entered kindergarten more prepared in regards to their social and emotional health and their academics. Students who have access to high-quality preschool also often can more readily receive supports or students can be identified earlier for special education or other interventions.

Key Actions:

- Fully fund Oregon's early intervention and early childhood special education program.
- Provide more access to high-quality, culturally responsive/appropriate preschool programs.
- Fully fund K-12 special education.

Decrease prescriptive academic requirements

Students must learn to read and write, of course. But students should also learn how to think critically, to work collaboratively, and to creatively solve problems. Too often, schools approach school improvement by only looking to improve student scores on the summative statewide assessments. Districts have focused on narrow interventions, more prescriptive curriculum maps and schedules, and by doubling down on skills-based instruction rather than taking a whole child approach.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced No Child Left Behind, the federal education framework in place from 2001-2017, which over-emphasized high-stakes tests as the sole measure of school quality and student success. ESSA renews the promise of a well-rounded education for students and recognizes that students and schools are more than just test scores. ESSA reduces emphasis on summative test scores and ODE does not mandate specific interventions or common strategies in schools like rigid 90-minute instructional blocks. Schools and districts should drop overly prescriptive local mandates that leave little time for authentic, interdisciplinary, and student-centered learning opportunities.

Key Actions:

- Evaluate effectiveness of school and district policies or practices that mandate instructional blocks, double-interventions for struggling students, rigid curriculum calendars and other similar prescriptive requirements.
- Include time in the school day for deliberate and intentional social and emotional learning, community building, and creative thinking, learning, and play.
- Restore well-rounded educational opportunities including access to music, fine arts, quality library programs, and other electives, and restore recess, physical education, and opportunity for physical movement.

Diverse range of supported instructional settings

One-size-fits-all classrooms can rarely serve the needs of all. Students need access to a more diverse range of instructional settings ranging from informal calming spaces or calming rooms to more intensive interventions such as specialized programs, both within the school and outside the school. (Placement has a legal definition under the federal Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act and OEA is suggesting a range of settings that include informal structures and formalized placements.)

Over the years, many instructional setting options including informal programs and specific placements have been lost.

Additionally, schools are overcrowded so even if schools or districts could support a variety of instructional settings for students, they often lack the physical space to do so.

An important instructional setting to establish is calming spaces or rooms. These are places students can go when they need help self-regulating or calming down their bodies and emotions. They are sometimes referred to as de-escalation rooms, quiet rooms, or sensory rooms. Widely used in a variety of settings, it is important they are not used as a place of punishment, but rather for prevention and self-regulation. They must also be staffed with appropriately trained personnel who can support social and emotional skills development, self-regulation techniques, and other trauma informed practices. Programmatic elements within a range of settings could include: one-on-one adult support, social skills instruction, smaller class sizes, mental health professionals onsite, and a range of culturally responsive

“Room clears have become the norm and traumatize all students and staff.”

and trauma informed disciplinary options. Additional programs and placements could also include more specialized settings where students temporarily receive instruction and support outside of the traditional classroom. These specialized settings could be on-site or off-site, be run by a district or in partnership with community-based services, or other evidence-based programs.

It is important to note the forum data uncovered concerns about a lack of supports for the inclusion model. In an inclusion model, students identified for special education services receive the majority of instruction

in a traditional classroom with their peers. However, large class sizes and unmanageable caseloads – coupled with reductions in classroom assistants and the loss of other personnel like counselors and

school psychologists – mean that some students enter classrooms in an inclusion model without the necessary supports for success. To ensure success in an inclusion model, necessary supports must be in place.

Key Actions:

- Provide funding for additional instructional setting supports and on-site and off-site programs and placements.
- Increase professional learning on providing social and emotional learning supports and self-regulation techniques to students in a range of settings; and provide more courses and practical experiences in educator preparation programs to prepare aspiring educators to work in inclusion models and a diverse array of on-site and off-site instructional settings.
- Fully fund special education in Oregon to ensure adequate supports for the inclusion model.

¹³ Restraints and Seclusions, Oregon Revised Statutes Vol. 9 §§ 339.285-339.308 (2017).

¹⁴ Committee on Physical Activity and Physical Education in the School Environment, Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine. (2013). Physical Activity, Fitness, and Physical Education: Effects on Academic Performance. In HW Cook and HW Kohl, III (Eds.), *Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK201501/>

¹⁵ Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century, Oregon Revised Statutes Vol. 9 §§ 329.496-329.504.

Clarify physical intervention and restraint protocols

Physical intervention and restraining students should rarely be used as a first response and be reserved for emergencies when physical intervention and restraint is necessary to prevent injury or unwanted touch of an intimate nature. Many of the other recommendations in this report should decrease the need for this level of intervention.

The implementation of Oregon's restraint and seclusion law¹³ in schools and districts has had unintended consequences. Many forum participants reported that there are often not enough adults in a school building who have received the highly specialized training in Oregon-approved restraint protocols or those adults are often out of the building. This leaves educators feeling helpless to physically intervene to prevent extreme behaviors and student injuries.

Oregon's law does allow for non-trained educators to use physical restraint in emergency situations. However, educators have faced discipline for intervening in emergency situations where students could reasonably harm themselves or someone else such as students running into the streets, climbing on furniture, or throwing objects. Instead, educators often resort to clearing classrooms to minimize the threat of harm rather than introduce a physical intervention or, in some cases, sacrifice their own safety to protect students or to avoid discipline.

Educators want clear protocols in place to know when they can use less restrictive physical interventions to prevent a crisis or what to do in cases of emergency when a trained adult is unavailable and failing to intervene would cause harm to a student or the educator. Examples of less restrictive physical interventions include blocking students' hands, removing students from furniture, or removing objects from students' hands.

Key Actions:

- Convene an interagency workgroup that includes state agencies and educator organi-

zations to create joint guidance on Oregon's restraint and seclusion statutes and administrative rules.

- Develop clear reporting guidelines to both define and track the prevalence of room clears and to identify any disproportional use of physical interventions, restraint, or room clears with historically underserved students.
- Create a clear, transparent reporting process for emergency restraint situations that allows for educators to act to keep students and themselves safe while adhering to the intent of the law, eliminating educator fears of discipline, and reducing disproportional responses.
- Consider changes to the restraint and seclusion law to ensure educators can use physical intervention when necessary to prevent injury or inappropriate touch.

Increase opportunities for physical movement

OEA also recommends ensuring that time for physical movement and exercise is part of every school day. Extensive research¹⁴ has linked improved student academic outcomes and improved student behavior with more opportunities for students to engage in physical activity. Opportunities to breathe fresh air and take a break from the pressures of the classroom can be valuable tools for managing student moods and outbursts. Specific ideas included regular recess, structured recess, regular movement breaks, and funding full-time physical education teachers. In Oregon, physical education is the only content area with state-mandated minimal instructional minutes¹⁵ but many schools have struggled to bring on enough qualified physical education teachers, structure schedules to include the mandated minimums, or find enough gym or facility space.

Key Actions:

- Eliminate overly prescriptive district mandates such as instructional blocks or double-intervention schedules that reduce time in the day for physical activity such as recess or PE classes.

- Provide flexible seating options in classrooms such as standing desks, wobble stools and other non-traditional seating arrangements that encourage movement and flexibility throughout the day.
- Provide opportunities during the day for movement and nutrition breaks and allow educators flexibility to take students on breaks outside of scheduled recess time.

Improve principal leadership and support

Educators in schools look to their principals as leaders on many issues, and behavior and discipline are no exception. Unfortunately, principals are often pulled out of the building for meetings or other activities and have extensive job duties that make them unavailable even while physically present in the building. Many participants asked that principals be there, both literally and figuratively, to “back them up” with disruptive events.

When students who are exhibiting behavior do not respond well, when behavior needs to be communicated to families, or when more intensive interventions are determined appropriate, educators want their principals to actively support the situation. They want “administrators who listen and help,” and who know what the classroom can be like by regularly spending time there. They asked principals to be “present” and “committed” to the school or district’s protocols. As for the district staff, they want them to “provide the supports” necessary to implement their behavior plan and to advocate for their educators on this issue at the state and federal levels.

Several forum participants felt that they were scrutinized for how they tried to help students and address extreme behavior and disruptions: “Oftentimes we hear that we should have prevented the outburst.” Some said they were not supported or backed up by their building and district administrations, who



were reluctant to inform families of incidents or take actions such as suspending students until safety or behavior intervention plans could be put into place. Making sure that teachers feel supported in creating safe classrooms is an essential part of addressing the disruptive environment.

Key Actions

- Limit required off-site meetings for principals during the school day.
- School and district leaders should regularly communicate about district policies and procedures regarding responses to disrupted learning environments.
- School leaders should regularly spend time in classrooms in a non-evaluative function to better understand what supports students and educators need.
- Increase support for implementing culturally responsive and trauma informed systems of discipline.

“Our district needs a K-12 consistent behavior protocol put in place.”

Conclusion

Disrupted learning environments are a significant and growing problem in Oregon classrooms. Society has a duty to provide free and appropriate public education to all students. It is impossible to fulfill this responsibility when schools lack the resources, systems, and support to meet students' needs. Addressing this challenge will not be easy, but it is essential.

Our future is at stake.

Under current conditions, Oregon cannot meet its aspirational goals for student success. Oregon has one of the shortest school years in the nation, averaging 165 days vs. 180 in many states.¹⁶ The 2018 Ed-Week Quality Counts report ranks Oregon education as 40th in the nation.¹⁷ The state's graduation rate is the third lowest in the country.¹⁸ Disrupted learning environments are not the sole cause of these conditions but they further erode educators' ability to deliver high quality instruction and meet the needs of all their students. If no action is taken, educators will continue to leave the profession, public trust in schools will erode, and the violence and disruption of these events will continue to be normalized. And ultimately, it is Oregon's students who will pay the price.

Oregonians must come together with new approaches to solve the entrenched, systemic issues at the root of this issue. The changes enacted must also move us away from former inequities and disproportional impacts on students identified for special education and historically underserved students. To revert back to old models that failed to support all students would be to take a step back, not a leap forward.

In addition to the myriad recommendations made in this report, OEA believes the following decision makers must take swift action to improve experiences for students.

- *Policymakers* can stop the growing crisis by fully funding schools, reducing class sizes and case-loads, and revisiting well-intended legislation that has had unintended consequences.
- *State education agencies* can provide support for high-quality professional development, help recruit and retain more onsite student supports with a focus on mental health, and support family and parent engagement and resources.
- *Districts and buildings* can encourage administrative leadership on this issue, loosen overly prescriptive academic mandates, ensure consistent and clear communication on school and district policies, and work collaboratively with educators, families and students.

Oregonians want to – and can – solve this issue.

“Let’s be the state that makes the change and helps ALL students.”

¹⁶ National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Table 5.14. Number of instructional days and hours in the school year, by state: 2018.* Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/tab5_14.asp.

¹⁷ Education Week. (2018). [Top to bottom rankings of school systems by state.] *Quality Counts 2018: Grading the States.* Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2018-state-grades/report-card-map-rankings.html>.

¹⁸ Hammond, Betsy. (2017, December 6). Oregon's graduation rate remains third-worst in nation. *The Oregonian/OregonLive.* Retrieved from https://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2017/12/oregons_graduation_rate_remain.html.



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