
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

April 11, 2019

Co-Chairs Roblan and Smith Warner and Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success:

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon (PPAO) respectfully requests that the committee support the Student Success Act (SSA), which would raise \$2 billion in revenue per biennia for meaningful investment into our schools. PPAO is the statewide political voice for Planned Parenthood's two Oregon affiliates and for reproductive health care. PPAO defends the Planned Parenthood mission by advocating for public policy that will enhance and protect access to medically accurate, developmentally appropriate sexual health education. Planned Parenthood is the nation's largest provider of sex education, reaching 1.5 million people a year.

As a result of our current tax system, Oregon has been divesting in our schools for decades. Oregon students face some of the largest class sizes in the country and graduate at some of the lowest rates. Due to historical racism and ongoing structural barriers, black and brown students, indigenous students, LGBTQ+ students, low-income students and students with disabilities have suffered the most from this chronic underfunding of K-12 schools. Sustainably funding our schools requires meaningful investments that require the out-of-state corporations and moneyed special interests, which pay some of the lowest taxes in the country here in Oregon, to finally step up and pay their fair share. The SSA's proposal to raise new revenue must focus on progressivity, adequacy and equity. If we fully fund our education, we can begin to address historic inequities and give all students the tools they need to succeed in today's economy. The SSA is an important first step in that direction.

PPAO believes that student success is predicated on a nexus of factors, which includes youth's ability to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. Sex education develops those social-emotional skills; teaches youth how to advocate for and protect their bodily autonomy; and cultivates the knowledge and vocabulary necessary for positive health outcomes.

The current crisis in our classrooms has compromised our schools' ability to provide students with the sex education, healthy relationships training and child abuse prevention mandated by Oregon law. While Oregon is a leader in its sex education laws and standards, our statutes include no repercussions for noncompliance, and have no funding allocated for supporting districts in implementation, or monitoring implementation, except for the .5 FTE that the Department of Education allocates to issues related to sex education in Oregon.

The Oregon Health Authority recently surveyed school districts regarding their sex education policies and curricula. Only 35 school districts reported having the required plan of instruction, while 162 districts either did not reply or did not have a plan of instruction.¹ Across all the districts that replied to the survey, the top barrier to being in compliance with the law was a lack of adequate funding. The other top two barriers that districts identified were lack of curriculum guidance and lack of training.² All three barriers are related to a lack of adequate funding and resources—a problem we must begin to address.

Access to information, resources and quality health care is a fundamental right and shouldn't depend on who we are or where we live. All young people deserve to have the information they need to make safe and healthy

¹ <https://geo.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=4bf3974813d4436793660897cb923311>

² Ibid

choices. Sex education is widely supported by a majority of Americans, the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, because we know that comprehensive sex education works. As a result of better access to accurate sex education and affordable birth control, the rate of unintended pregnancy among teens in Oregon has reached a historic low, and more young people are delaying sexual activity and using birth control when they do have sex. Between 1991 and 2015, the national teen birth rate dropped 64%, which resulted in \$4.4 billion in public savings in 2015 alone.⁵ Decreases in teen pregnancy coincide with decreases in high school dropout rates for girls, and improves health outcomes for subsequent generations.

Studies show that sex education programs additionally help youth make decisions about their futures; connect them with health services; and prevent sexual violence and gender-based discrimination. Sex education and healthy relationship training improve social-emotional well-being by teaching skills related to building safe and positive relationships, understanding and accepting difference, challenging bias, resolving conflict, making healthy decisions, and defining and promoting enthusiastic consent practices that empower youth to claim their right to bodily autonomy.⁶ Sex education supports the SSA's mission to promote student health and safety, including emphasizing social-emotional learning and development; supporting mental and behavioral health; improving school climate; promoting student health and wellness; utilizing trauma-informed practices; and combating bullying and preventing suicide through LGBTQ+ inclusive and affirming curriculum. As outlined above, sex education in combination with affordable birth control is an important factor in dropout prevention.

We have come a long way as a result of increasing access to sex education, but we still have work to do. The U.S. teen pregnancy rate is still much higher than most of the industrialized world. Further, in 2017, the birth rate among African American and Latina teens age 15-19 was approximately twice as high as that of non-Latino white teens, while the birth rate of American Indian/Alaska Native teens was highest among all race/ethnicities.⁷ Historically marginalized groups continue to face the largest structural barriers to accessing quality health care and information.

The revenue raised through the SSA is a crucial first step to adequately funding our schools. This bill is an opportunity to build a model of public education that is sustainably funded and dedicated to closing measurable gaps for historically underserved students. While none of the \$2 billion in revenue proposed by the bill has been earmarked for sex education, this conversation about revenue and investment is an important starting point for assessing and prioritizing implementation of Oregon's sex education, healthy relationships and child abuse prevention laws. Sex education provides trauma-informed social-emotional, mental, behavioral and physical health support to youth. It is a smart investment that will benefit the state with a stronger economy, stronger public health outcomes and a stronger community.

It's time for a game-changing investment in Oregon schools. It's time to ask a little more of corporations so we can do so much better by Oregon students. We urge the committee to support the Student Success Act, in its efforts to raise at least \$2 billion to invest in our schools and students.

Sincerely,

Emily McLain
Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/about/index.htm>

⁶ <https://siecus.org/sex-ed-is-a-vehicle-for-social-change/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=cc47263d-030b-4433-bd66-fd1e3fd26f45>

⁷ Ibid