

April 12, 2019

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success,

We are writing to provide testimony for your hearing on your conceptual framework for HB 2019, to share our strong reservations about key components of the framework.

Our hope--and that of many educators--has been for the Legislature to address what has now been decades of disinvestment in Oregon public schools and find a way to fund what have long been considered the basic components of an education program, which are defined in and required by existing Oregon statutes and OARs. It is our position that these program components should be funded at the levels recommended in the Quality Education Model provided by the Quality Education Commission.

We appreciate that the proposed framework includes those basic components of an education program, including school library programs, which are our focus; however, we are deeply concerned because the framework does not guarantee that those components will be funded and implemented for all students in our state. In the Committee's framework, only 50% of available funds will be designated for the School Improvement Account, to fund the types of school program components that were once considered a basic part of any educational program: adequate instructional time, reasonable class sizes, a safe and healthy learning environment, and a well-rounded curriculum taught by appropriately licensed and endorsed teachers. Instead of requiring that all components be supported, the state seems to be leaving it up to districts to determine which of them it will choose to support.

We strongly object to this model, for it does two detrimental things:

1. It doesn't mandate that districts must provide the basic education Oregon's children need and deserve and that our existing laws require us to provide;
2. It pits educators within a district against each other in a struggle for resources that all of us need, creating division and competition, rather than collaboration and cooperation.

Frankly, we doubt that school libraries would do well in a competition for what will continue to be scarce resources. Why? It's not because school library programs aren't vital to graduation rates and increased learning; there's a preponderance of research-based evidence to prove that they are, especially for traditionally underserved students. But, fighting for resources quickly turns into a political game, one that is hard to win when your numbers are small. There are currently only 151 licensed teacher librarians left in our state; many districts now have no librarian at all to advocate for library programs, and, because of our long practice of disinvestment, they don't have experience with the benefits of strong school libraries and what they would bring to teaching and learning in Oregon's schools.

We have every reason to believe that school library programs (and others with small numbers, such as TAG) will continue to be underfunded in such a scenario. This spring, OASL couldn't even get a weak library bill (HB 3263) to get a hearing in the education committee because it would have required districts to work toward funding library programs in the future, through the CIP process. Clearly, our legislators know that many districts have chosen not to fund the staff they need to restore strong library programs to the levels required by our OARs and the QEM, and they are not willing to mandate doing so. If the Student Success Act were to include adequate funding to improve (or reinstate) all of the components listed in the School Improvement Account, there should have been no issue with passing our bill (much less getting it out of committee).

That school library programs would fail to win support at the district level does not mean that the programs don't have value for school communities or should not be a priority. It just means that we don't have much power and that our school systems have too much need. This has been our reality for the last two decades. We think it is the job of the state to provide enough funding to alleviate the kind of resource scarcity that creates in-fighting over scraps and to create systems that ensure that we fund what is important, not just what is politically popular.

We are also opposed to the cumbersome and bureaucratic processes described in the framework document because of the resources that will be consumed to implement them. Instead of maximizing resources on building quality programs and providing direct services and materials for students, we will use a significant portion of the funds attached to the Student Success Act to identify goals, write grants and plans, administer grants and plans, create reports and audits, and create Student Success Teams within ODE, an agency that already lacks the resources it needs to do all that it is tasked with. We don't need more bureaucracy and accountability; we need to better use the systems already in place.

We already have statutes and OARs that define what schools are supposed to do. We already have a continuous improvement process in which districts identify goals and plans to achieve them, and we have a state report card system that provides an annual assessment of schools and districts. What we don't have is a state agency with the resources to ensure that schools are complying with existing mandates, or districts with the resources to meet them. We don't need another under-funded set of requirements on top of those that the state already has inadequate resources to oversee.

We are testifying to provide support for strong school libraries statewide, which are the programs we serve, but the challenges we've encountered in trying to advocate for library programs are not specific to libraries. Libraries are a microcosm of the larger system; what's happening (and not) with them is what is happening (and not) throughout the system as a whole.

In light of our concerns with the current proposed framework, we urge this committee to do the following:

1. Create a progressive tax plan that provides the resources we need to fund districts at QEM levels--something already required by voters but not currently implemented by our state.
2. Connect the funds to mandates that districts provide *all* of the programs and services that are already required by existing Oregon laws and rules.
3. Strengthen ODE's resources and authority so that they can provide true oversight, accountability, and support for districts to comply with existing Oregon statutes and administrative rules.

We urge you to be politically brave and bold and give schools what we need to give our students what they need. A quality education, to include strong school libraries, should not be optional.

Respectfully,

Oregon Association of School Libraries Advocacy Committee

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