

May 13, 2019

Oregon House Human Services and Housing Committee

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chairs Noble and Sanchez, Representatives Helt, Meek, Mitchell, Schouten, Williams, and Zika

As a supporter of Washington County Kids, an expansive organization with over 150 individuals and organizations, I urge you to support the passage of SB543 to add children's service districts to the 28 currently allowed special districts.

OST programs have a proven effect on student outcomes. Students benefit academically and socially from programs that increase the number of recreational opportunities for economically disadvantaged students (After School Alliance, 2014; Rand, 2015; Durlak, Weissberg, et al, 2011). High-quality, well-managed and -structured OST opportunities can help foster youth development of critical academic, social, and emotional attributes and skills (Lauer et al., 2006; Bodilly and Beckett, 2005).

Having worked in the field of education for over 30 years as a college recruiter and higher education administrator, the benefits of robust OST programs are clear to me. The distinct economic barriers and lack of out-of-school and recreational opportunities undermine student's ability to grow through their curiosity and imagination, stifling their creative and economic potential. I have mentored numerous students over the years who were limited by the number of opportunities in their community, restricting their ability to enter into competitive programs and higher education institutions, compared to more economically advantaged students. We know that these programs have high yields: students learn team-building and leadership skills, and grow in maturity and their understanding of the world around them. I am eager to see support from our legislators for measures to improve the accessibility of services that overall help students overcome adversity. Taking decisive action now may help to begin to eliminate some of the academic achievement gaps among students. I have also seen the profound impact of afterschool activities on behavioral and mental health. For students that have challenges at home, these programs are a lifeline, providing social and emotional support that may help improve self-esteem and other personal image issues. I would also add that some of these programs empower student's cultural identities, which is a valuable lens to explore as we explore ways to improve diversity and equity.

I heard from one student who expressed that the availability of OST programs made a profound impact on his life. He recounts that he was able to build a sense of community and identity, formed bonds and developed friendships that would not have been likely without these programs, and learned stress management and coping skills that have come in handy throughout life. These programs change lives.

As a mother and grandmother, educator and mentor, I urge you to pass this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Narce Rodriguez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Narce Rodriguez

