

How to Testify in the Senate

Hello Senator,

I was looking forward to testifying in person, however I have a district commitment that is now taking precedence. Again, I apologize for the inconvenience to the committee and your staff. I look forward to continuing to be a part of the chorus of voices sharing the same message: Access and agency may be inconvenient, but they are necessary, and they are the law. That we as educators and mentors hold dear our future generations and propagate or wilt their dream should matter. If we cannot see beyond the conveniences of systems, built on fixed mindsets, we fail to recognize the humanity and possibility of us all.

First I want to thank the committee for taking the time today to read my testimony. It is an honor to be invited. I also would like to thank Senator Gelser for writing such a needed and such an impassioned bill.

Often when folks learn you are a teacher they ask, What do you teach? I always find this so interesting a question... Humans. I teach humans. Our next generation. I teach our future. I also teach self-awareness, self empowerment, self directed learning, confidence in one's own abilities, and I teach the young humans in my charge how to say and hear 'No'. No is a powerful word. It is a word of

agency. It is a word we do not often hear from those provided access, but no agency. It's also a homonym, which leads me to the second know. To know is to begin to understand. To be able to define the problem. To see through a different lens. If we do not correctly define the problem and support the vision of every student in our systems and practices we are working harder, not smarter. I want to help you work smarter today.

I am here today as a community member and lifelong educator having taught humans grades K through 12 and adult learners. I have taught in brick and mortar and in online settings. In rural schools and in city schools. In places wired for the latest of technology and in places where deer jerky may be the meat store for the family for the winter and that small token shared with you was a precious gift. I am a public servant and have a responsibility to educate all students. Public schools take public money and have a responsibility for educating everyone in their charge and providing everyone equal opportunity. That each requires something different to reach their potential is something I would expect given the diversity of the human experience and range of beauty in our children. All students must have access. Senate bill 819 is, at its core, about access. Who in our community is able to walk through the doors of our schools? Who in our community feels welcome enough to walk through the doors of our schools? Who in our community is missing and is unable to walk through the doors of our schools? Who has walked away from our public schools and why? With a few additions, I believe SB819 can transform public education in Oregon.

Our parents have trusted us. Our communities have trusted us, our public schools, to care for all of its children. Since early legislation in 1959 to the reauthorization of IDEA in 2014, recognition of all members of our community and their needs in public education settings is our ongoing mission. This bill hopes to continue that conversation. I believe you are starting to capture data on the scope of a concern but I don't believe data alone will create the changes needed for this bill to succeed.

I have had opportunities to have conversations, many conversations, with our students and families over my professional career, and I tell you, we are not listening. Systems are not listening and if they are listening, they are admiring the problem or in need of solutions. Our leadership needs your support more than ever. Our leadership needs education about disabilities. Today we are serving increasing numbers of students in general education settings and our communities are demonstrating an increasing awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities in workplace settings so they have access to competitive employment.

COVID has also changed the landscape of the student experience and brought new possibilities, and terrible heartache. Our families need more options. Technology has stepped up to answer the challenge. I had strongly hoped that the state would have been able to develop and offer to districts a statewide online curriculum. This would provide consistency in online education for students whose families who may be more mobile and economy of scale for our

taxpayers. I am hopeful that a statewide online option is still in discussion.

Virtual learning is a typical and expected part of higher education and corporate environments. Skill with tools of technology are required for many careers. The skill to thrive in distant environments that require greater autonomy, agency, and self directed learning are skills we must teach to ALL students. Virtual learning provides greater access than ever before to historically underserved community members. It can provide a customized educational environment and accessibility tools. For individuals experiencing medical conditions that make the neighborhood school environment inaccessible, online education creates perhaps the only access to a public education. Virtual course offerings provide optimized educational settings to all students, but may be necessary for those who are neurodivergent or experience environmental barriers to access FAPE. Virtual courses provide access to curriculum at the learners pace. It can be translated into multiple languages, as well as Braille, ASL/ BSL+. It can read the curriculum to the student in the instructor's voice or in a student's or own voice and cadence. It provides ways for interactions far beyond those capable in brick and mortar settings. Students today are connected worldwide. I think you will find for years we have relied on technology to connect education to the world. We have evolved beyond the need for daily access to a brick and mortar school building to do so.

I urge you to look beyond the issue of online education and SBA 819 and even IDEA, to ask the broader question: Why do we still not

have full access for all our community's children in their public school? Why would we create exclusions to gathering this important data? Senate bill 819 is powerful and it is creating change but its power has not been fully recognized. Senator Gelser crafted the opportunity for a transformational conversation, rather than simply a transactional one. We simply need the correct folks to have that conversation.

Senate bill 819 is a truancy bill. Truancy is defined as, “the action of staying away from school without good reason.” Senate bill 819 seeks the answer to the question, “What is the reason a member of our school community is not with us today and everyday? When the reason lies within the home, the school district intervenes and supports the parent. It also provides legal protections and processes for the parent, student, and family when greater help is needed through a truancy process.

Senate bill 819 seeks to answer the question, what is the impact on those historically without a voice when the reason for truancy lies within the structure, systems, climate and culture of our neighborhood schools? It asks those most responsible, whose daily practices and beliefs that shape the community, to have the needed conversation about the accessibility of the school community and the needs of the child in its care. This is the duty of our leadership, the principals in our public schools. This conversation between a parent, a child, and the individual in whom they placed their trust for eight hours a day with a member of their family, a very piece of their soul, is the one that is most necessary. It is a conversation that may require

education and experience for our leadership, and our to be able to fully hear and understand. The conversation building leadership has with those excluded, whether by inaction or design, and the documentation of that conversation to produce action and change, is the transformational experience we are seeking with this bill. It is vitally important that leadership see and understand more deeply just how many students are not being fully served. It is this conversation that SB 819 seeks to capture.

As I share with my students when you're prepared to hear the word NO, go for it when you ask. So here's my ask to you Senators:

1) Require the head building principal or leader in all settings to complete all SB 819 paperwork. This is an administrative issue at its core. I do believe that having building level administrators not simply at the table, but leading and documenting the discussion, a discussion of access to the educational setting that is in no small part that administrators' living interpretation of a school districts mission is critical. Those are the folks most responsible for the leadership, planning, PD, budget, and implementation of policies that create the climate and culture of a school. Every student deserves the same scrutiny and support.

2) Complete SB 819 paperwork for any student who is 10 day dropped for attendance. This student has been receiving a de facto shortened school day/year and their minutes of education have been reduced. Why? This is the opportunity for conversation. No, not simply for special education students, for every student. As I have

said, Senate bill 819 is an opportunity for a conversation. To fully capture every voice, I request the SEEDS survey be sent to any student and family who have completed initial SB 819 paperwork and again the 90 day review for students on continuing ASD. Providing parents and families an opportunity to share their voice outside of a setting in which they may not feel comfortable is critical.

3) Principals will need ongoing professional development on disability. Many have minimal background in disability and even more so, may simply not have experience accommodating disabled individuals at a systems level, so do not see. I request that all administrators complete 30 hours of job shadow/internship in programs serving students with disabilities, with a specific focus on transition and competitive employment practices and outcomes for students with disabilities.

Senator Gelsler has given the people of the state of Oregon, the educational system of the state of Oregon, and the leadership of our schools in the state of Oregon, an incredibly valuable opportunity. An opportunity to begin to have genuine conversations about diversity, community, exclusion and the human experience so a student's interaction with their school is a place of boundless possibility instead of a place of exhaustion or fear. Senate Bill 819 can be a powerful change agent and educational tool if properly utilized. Our children are the future of Oregon. I want every single

one of them to have a competitive living wage job and be a contributor to Oregon's future.