

To: House Committee on Education
From: Mona Khalil
RE: Support for HB 2656, Elevate Student Voice Act

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Hudson and members of the committee—

My name is Mona Khali and I am here today to express my support for House Bill 2656, the Elevate Student Voice Act.

I have been an educator for fourteen years. I currently teach third grade at Tigard-Tualatin School District. I am also a Teacher Advisor on the Oregon Department of Education School Board. I support this bill because it advocates for students' mental health, safety, and sense of belonging.

I was born in Cairo, Egypt. A key aspect of my upbringing was constant change. Not only change in physical surroundings, but in social situations, language, culture, and education. My character is highly reflective of the changes I experienced, and I have embraced flexibility, understanding, and most importantly diversity in my approach to educating.

During my time in public schools, I was still learning English through the English Language Learning program. I was often treated as less intelligent by teachers and other staff because of my scores on standardized assessments. This created an even larger divide between myself and culture and the American public schools. My experiences in public schools as well as having children of my own inspired my motivation to be an educator, and make changes to a system I knew could be difficult to navigate as a minority.

State assessments are important, but they're only a small glimpse into a child's education. Including students and valuing their input and opinions creates an environment where children feel appreciated and welcome. Every person has a unique story to tell. Backgrounds, cultures, languages, religions, genders, perspectives, and opinions will give the districts, schools, and teachers the opportunity to educate the whole child.

We measure and assess what we value. And if we value what students are experiencing in schools, we must ensure that every school district, across all corners of the state, are utilizing the tools at hand, like the Student Educational Equity Survey and the Student Health Survey, to better understand and support how students are doing in

schools. These surveys ask critical questions that help the state and ODE to better target resources and support where it's needed most.

What we know about learning is that when students feel safe, healthy, have a connection to their community and have their basic needs met, we see these are the essential building blocks to then learn. You can't learn when you're hungry, afraid, or don't feel a sense of belonging.

These surveys help us see with an insightful eye into things like student mental health and conditions for learning. They ask about whether students have access to tools that help connect them with teachers; whether they have access to a full-rounded education, such as play, art or music; and they ask about whether students have a trusted adult either in or outside of school. These are critical questions to understanding student experiences and how those voices connect to what is and is not working in our schools. The data from these surveys have similar privacy rules that apply to other statewide assessments, so there is not a fear that these answers will be used to identify or single-out a student for their honest responses.

Thank you for your time today and I encourage the committee to vote YES on HB 2656.

Mona Khalil
Tigard-Tualatin School District