

February 8, 2023

To: House Committee on Education  
From: Jamie Jenson, School Counselor  
Re: Support for HB 2656

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Hudson, members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Jamie and I am a school counselor in Gladstone, sharing supportive comments for HB 2656, the Elevate Student Voice Act.

We have been actively promoting the whole child approach in Gladstone, but HB 2656 would go a long way in helping to embed student voices in our continued assessment of school quality and student success.

We are actively addressing support needs of our students k-12 and have engaged new, important levels of support based on student identified needs from several measures. As we all know the pandemic brought significant impacts on our students and families, but the silver lining we are seeing at the secondary level is a new level of self-awareness. Students are vocal about the struggle, open to professional help and eager to learn how to manage their unique stressors.

Speaking specifically to the high school level we have partnered with different outside community-based agencies for drug and alcohol support and part time professional counseling. With funding from the Student Success Act we have been able to provide a medical assistant to our students each school day, compared to almost once a week access to a nurse in prior times. As a district we have trained our staff with QPR, with all of our counselors and school psychologists as the trainers. We have written grants to purchase curriculum for half of our students so far to teach skills around social emotional learning, helping students with self-understanding, search for meaning and focus on looking to adults at school whom they trust for guidance.

This past school year we have added a Wellness Coordinator at the district level to support student and staff needs around wellness. This coordinator has contact at all school levels to assess interventions, building level teams and professional development. This past fall, at the high school we were able to partner with The Latino Network and the Clackamas County Juvenile Department to receive training in a brief intervention screening for all 9th grade students that assessed student risk and allowed each student a follow up conversation with either GHS staff or staff from Latino Network. This tool was extremely user friendly and gave immediate feedback for risk behaviors like disordered eating, chemical abuse/use, sexual activity, family dynamics, protective factors and traits, social supports, etc. the student report validity was high and they knew we were going to talk with them in 1-3 days following their survey.

All of these tools are the result of intentional resourcing which comes directly from what we know from student voices. We need to be able to bridge higher levels of support to students and their families, knowing that healthcare systems are overloaded at the community level or the barriers to access help

are too high (i.e. transportation, copays, confidentiality concerns). As trained school counselors we have for more than the last decade been placed in a role that feels closer to Social Worker, although that is not the training or ethical role that we have - it is the level of need that our students present.

We know our students are more than a test score and we all need the support to help our kids become their best selves, to heal from their trauma and to learn how to navigate and foster healthy relationships. Your support in bringing more attention and funding to the social and emotional wellbeing of all Oregon students is needed more than words can express.

Please take that step toward a statewide approach to embed student feedback and voices in how we measure school quality. I urge the committee's support of HB 2656.

Thank you,

Jamie Jenson

School Counselor