



Three Rivers School District
Quality Education Runs Deep

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Good Afternoon Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Dawn Werner, I am employed as a Human Resources Assistant for the Three Rivers School District and I am testifying on SB 283. While I understand the current bill supports a study, I'd like to provide my unique perspective for some of the experiences in Southern Oregon.

In my role, I work directly with our TSPC licensed educators and administrators. It has been my experience working for a rural school district in Southern Oregon that the challenges of recruiting and retaining, especially in regards to a diverse workforce, extend well beyond the walls of a school district. In the last three years alone, we have had seven teachers leave the workforce because of a lack of access to infant and toddler childcare and affordable childcare. Three of those teachers resigned mid-year this school year. Josephine County is also facing a housing crisis where 50% of renters in the area are rent burdened and the average asking rent in Grants Pass in 2021 was \$1,476. A household would need to earn \$59,000 to afford this rent (Housing Affordability and Housing Production, ECONorthwest, <https://www.grantspassoregon.gov/DocumentCenter/View/23581/Housing-Solutions-Community-Forum?bidId=>). A starting salary for a first year teacher is \$40,415.00. This makes recruiting from outside of the area nearly impossible. The wait list for homes and the oftentimes short-timeline needed to relocate, deter many applicants from even applying let alone accepting a position. Another barrier to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce is the culture of the community itself. Josephine County is 92.4% White (United States Census Bureau, Josephine County, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/josephinecountyoregon/PST045221>). In an area where micro and macro racial aggressions are experienced daily by our BIPOC citizens, recruiting BIPOC staff into the hostile community is incredibly difficult and essentially sets them up for failure.

The one barrier that the District experiences while trying to recruit and retain, and is often heard through staff surveys, is in regards to salaries. At a neighboring city district a starting teacher makes nearly 2% more annually than our teachers. It is just a reality that when 8.7% of our general fund budget is allocated to transportation costs alone in 2021-2022, the general fund allocation for teacher salaries must be adjusted appropriately in order to continue to be fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars. A statewide teacher salary floor (so to speak) could help tremendously when it comes to educator recruitment to a rural area. Taking salary off the table

and allowing an educator to look exclusively at climate, culture and opportunity when choosing an employer would level the playing field.

Currently, our District contracts with Southern Oregon Education Service District (SOESD) for Substitute Services. This means that SOESD hires and employs licensed substitute teachers for the entire region, giving substitute teachers access to substitute in multiple districts while completing the hiring process only once. If substitute teachers were required to become District employees the District is looking at having to pay increased employer costs including PERS contributions, employer tax contributions, sick leave and health insurance. The administrative burden of bringing substitutes back in-house and having to run monthly payrolls, yearly W2's, and other employer reporting and tracking requirements would also increase drastically. I also worry about SOESD potentially losing an entire service they provide to the region.

Believe me when I say, our District is acutely aware of the substitute shortage. We have schools located in Cave Junction, Williams, Merlin and Grants Pass; our District spans nearly 1,200 square miles. The distance a substitute has to travel is a deterrent. The licensing barriers substitutes also face is a barrier. The cost of renewing a substitute license (which can be yearly if they are on an Emergency or Restricted license) is prohibitive as well as future Professional Development Unit requirements for renewal. While we absolutely want experienced substitutes, who play a positive role in our students lives, I'd like to suggest that removing financial barriers for substitutes (especially considering many are retired educators), perhaps offering a mileage reimbursement either through a tax credit or increased state substitute rate may help entice licensed substitutes back to the profession.

Thank you for your time and consideration on these important topics.



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Three Rivers School District