

Submitter: Terese Harris
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB3014

Hello Chair Neron, Vice Chair Wright, Vice Chair Hudson, and members of the Committee, for the record my name is Terese Harris and I am a parent to three wonderful children who attended Jason Lee Elementary School in NE Portland.

In 2016, I worked at Jason Elementary School as a parent liaison where my kids attended school and the principal there created a special paid position for me to organize walking school buses. I had the opportunity to work with Representative Nguyen who was a School Attendance Coach in Portland Public Schools at the time. We coordinated a safe, fun, and supervised Walking School Bus for students who lived within walking distance from the school to address the attendance and tardy challenges. We collaborated with teachers, the PTA, the Portland Bureau of Transportation's Safe Routes to School team, who provided resources and incentives for students such as umbrellas, bike gear, and snacks to make walking to school exciting for students.

During our walking routes we learned about the community our students lived in and the challenges they had getting to school. I found out that some of our students lived in motels along NE 82nd avenue; and that people often sped through residential roads where students were walking. After a few weeks kids were getting excited about coming to school and both parents and students were looking forward to the Walking School Bus. We were able to coordinate the Walking School Bus for a couple of years while I was working at Jason Lee. I'm proud to say that we saw attendance improve by 30%, which is critical to students' scholastic success rates, especially for BIPOC students. We also saw a significant decrease in disruptive classroom behavior from these students, because they were able to get out all their wiggles and jitters on the morning walk to school.

Unfortunately, after I left the school, the Walking School Bus did not continue. This grassroot community effort takes a lot of coordination, time and resources from volunteers. I would like to see the Walking School Bus be available to all students and schools across the state, but not every school has a parent like me, or a principal like the one at Jason Lee who saw the value of this work and had the funds to compensate me. Most parents don't have time to volunteer to do this at their kids' schools. And our schools are struggling to pay for the necessities so there are no funds for Safer Routes to School Coordinators. HB3014 will give school districts the ability to pay for these things out of their existing transportation budgets. Please support our students and pass the School Transportation Options bill.

Thank you.