

March 16, 2023

Senate Committee on Rules
Chair Kate Lieber

RE: HB 2708

On behalf of OSEA, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2708, which would make the first full week in March Classified Employees Week.

I am a member of the Retired Oregon School Employees (ROSE). As a member of ROSE, I have seen education change. But one element has remained constant in all my years of education – the constant support classified employees give to students in small and big communities throughout Oregon.

Classified employees are the backbone of our schools. They are, most often, the first people present in our schools daily and the last people to leave at the end of the day. Our bus drivers are the first school contact most children have each day, often setting the tone. Working in a school building, you learn that if there is a minor disaster or a special need by staff, the people you reach out to first for quick action is the school secretary or the custodian. Food service staff are more than just the people who prepare and serve meals. They are people who make real connections with students and impact the way they feel about school. Educational assistants are a vital piece of school classrooms, working with individuals and groups of students in addition to assisting the teachers with things like classroom organization and management.

I worked as a classified employee for Head Start in Oakridge for 13 years before I retired. During several of those years, Head Start was housed in the Oakridge Elementary School. I got to witness firsthand the work and cooperative atmosphere among the classified staff. While not part of the school district, I saw firsthand the hard work that keeps our district running.

When COVID came on the scene, classified employees were charged with making sure everything was clean and sanitized to newer, more strict standards. And they stepped up to the task. Classified staff cleaned, sanitized, rearranged classrooms and created ways to maintain required distancing. In addition to the work of making sure our buildings were safe and clean, bus drivers drove the bus routes daily with other classified employees like education assistants, custodians, whoever was available, to deliver meals to students along those school bus routes.

The work of classified school employees receives little recognition. They continue to work with short staffing and have some of the most demanding jobs. Many must work more than one job because the limited hours and lower pay make that necessary. If you ask them why they continue to do the work they do in our schools, they will tell you it is because they love the kids.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2708.

Susan Hardy

Oakridge, Oregon