

March 21, 2023

Senate Committee on Education
Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair

Re: Testimony in Support of SB 756 - 1 Amendments

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

On behalf of the over 23,000 members of OSEA in all 36 Oregon counties in nearly all levels of Oregon public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, education service districts, special districts like parks and rec, and community colleges, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the dash one amendments to SB 756.

The dash one amendments to SB 756 represent a meaningful state directive that acknowledges classified employees as a key group of frontline workers whose care provides daily support for Oregon's special education students, including some of the most medically fragile members in the system.

SB 756 allows access to the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) required by the state for all special education students that are a blueprint for a child's special education experience at school. While access to IEPs is available for classified staff in some school districts or Education Service Districts (ESDs), it is not a uniform policy or procedure in Oregon. Additionally, SB 756 gives access to 504 plans, which are plans identifying how the school or ESD will provide support and remove barriers for a student with a disability. The combination of access to the planning documents and the identification of classified staff as key members of the IEP teams is an important step in better understanding the needs of our special education students.

However, we would like to request the add back of the language in the original bill, as drafted, that identifies 15 minutes prior to student time to be spent reviewing notes on individual students while not on scene. This allows classified staff a very baseline opportunity to gather context and better understand how best to support their students in a new day.

It is important to note that many classified employees are scheduled in shifts of three or three and a half hours a day. So, it is common for one special education assistant to support the first three and a half hours of the school day without access to IEPs, while another staff steps in without ability to confer with colleagues. This creates a situation where classified staff are going in blind. This scenario does not set up the education team or student for success. Neither does it set the stage for best quality care and instruction.



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Special education assistants are typically responsible for student behavior management which is designed to constructively engage the student while mitigating disruption and disturbance to maximize constructive instructional time. This is very much like asking someone to open a door to an engaging and amazing person without access to the key.

Classified employees represent the most diverse component of Oregon's professional public education workforce, representing racial, cultural, language, age and geographic diversity. Our members' average wages are between \$20-30,000, annually. So, the acknowledgement of additional pay for classified employees that support special education is very much appreciated. However, we believe the language in SB 283 is more appropriate as it identifies a 20 percent pay differential for those classified employees who give significant support to special education students.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Senate Committee on Education for answering the call to address the critical staffing levels in many classified public education positions who's explicitly named support includes (but is not limited to) physical, behavioral, academic and social needs. By investing in the quality of employment of these vital roles, we believe the rate of retention and recruitment of classified employees will increase, so that together, we may support a higher quality public education experience for all students.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

Sincerely,

Susan Allen
OSEA Government Relations Specialist

