

Submitter: Gregg Heacock
Committee: Senate Committee on Education
Measure: SB1075

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Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Webber, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of SB1075. It is a fortunate coincidence that our OSU Library System has loaned me *Improving Reading in the Junior High School; A Librarian and a Core Teacher Work Together*, written in 1957 by my mentor, L. Jane Stewart, Core Teacher (along with Frieda M. Heller, Librarian, and Elsie J. Alberty, Coordinator of Research of The University School of The Ohio State University). Professor Stewart introduced me to how to teach poetry when she joined the faculty at OSU and I joined the College of Education, not having a clue what was entailed in understanding and enjoying poetry. It was a cute-meet. The Chancellors of OSU had shut down The University School mid-year because, when anti-war protests were disrupting the university campus, they realized that reading was a subversive activity. Professor Stewart, who taught a summer program at Harvard for teachers from other University Schools attached to Colleges and Universities around the country, was welcomed by peers to join them in the OSU College of Education. Meanwhile, I had returned to OSU from a winter-quarter in Mexico, D.F., where I decided to change my major from philosophy, which I barely read and my teachers barely taught, so I might extend my stay at OSU one more year, avoiding the draft and preparing to share with others the only thing that captured my interest, reading literature that helped me explore my own life. Ms. Stewart, using the inductive method, advocated by John Dewey, where students were solving problems in matters that engaged them until they found themselves needing help, which you would call “a teachable moment.” In reading poetry, Dr. Stewart shared with us a “Poetic Truth,” something poets had discovered that hadn’t been taught to us when we studied grammar and composition. It changed my life. Later in my teaching career, when I realized that the bag-of-tricks she had given me did not help me teach disadvantaged students who hadn’t learned how to read independently, I took classes at Cal State, L.A., to become a certified Reading Specialist. In this capacity, I started teaching high school students Young-Adult Literature, books related to issues connected to their own lives.

When I retired and moved to Oregon, I discovered you had the most successful, volunteer-run, state-wide independent reading program in the United States, the Oregon Battle of the Books. I was invited to coach a team of 5th-grade students back in 2016. The next year, I joined the High School Title Selection Committee. And, though I no longer serve on a committee, I have worked with someone who produces his own gelato to provide coupons as an incentive and reward for those who read 4 or more books as they participate in that competition. This I do because students’ feelings are hurt when their teams lose. I feel it is important to honor with recognition the work that they do. However, I must tell you that, while this program has been hugely successful for the 3rd-5th grade division, the numbers drop for those in middle school, and almost disappear for high school students, who are too busy pretending to read *The Heart of Darkness* (using Spark-Notes) because they lacked the support they might have found, had their schools provided adequate support for their librarian/media managers.

As Oregon is preparing to invest in early literacy instruction, we would be remiss to neglect the role that librarian/media managers serve in supporting core instruction with adequate and grade-appropriate reading materials and a knowledge of how computers could help students search the web to explore questions for an I-search. Good libraries protect students from indoctrination, serving their quest for information they can share with others seeking to know more about their world. Real research discourages students cheating themselves and others, using ChatGPT to do their work.

Reading now what Ms. Stewart wrote in 1957, I see that the role of the librarian in The University School included going over reading scores with core teachers so they could decide what books related to their subjects that might appeal to students of various reading abilities. This was a time when teachers and students were allowed personal agency, trusting them to learn from their mistakes. Getting right answers is overrated: it allows students to leave their education behind them. SB1075 is about freeing our teachers and students to regard their school library/media center as a font of wisdom, overseen by mentors able to provide for their various needs. I urge you to pass it now!