Re: HB 4078 relating to a statewide student information system

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, and Education Committee members,

In the early 2000s while working in Portland Public Schools, I participated in efforts to implement a student information system as part of a statewide effort among many districts to modernize their systems and leverage the shared costs. That system was called eSIS by a company named AAL.

In 2011-2012, led by Salem-Keizer in an RFP process, the existing workgroups and structure that districts had created in the past were again tasked with the search for a new vendor. An extensive application and vetting process was conducted, and I participated in that review and vendor selection process specifically for the special education module requirements. Now, over 90% of school districts in Oregon are using a SIS built by Edupoint called Synergy. While each district has its own implementation and records are not currently shared across the state due to privacy and local customization issues, the capabilities already exist for an ESR (Electronic Student Record).

Having volunteered my time in this area, particularly in facilitating the statewide special education workgroup since its inception, up until last year, we strove to include the department of education in all the initial configurations. In the most recent efforts, ODE staff in the special education department were participating and advising along the way from 2011 through the go-live for many districts in 2013. However, with staff turnover at ODE after that, they no longer participated and, in fact, reversed course and contradicted decisions already made, making our work much harder. For example, they made us go back and revisit nearly every element of our waiver to use the IEP configured in our system when the department unilaterally decided to change the content of the "Oregon standard IEP".

Regardless of those barriers imposed by ODE in recent years, for the software vendor, our statewide workgroups with collaborative functioning and efforts to support consistency in implementation between districts has been a model they frequently reference when working with other states.

My school psychologist colleagues and I often have great difficulty obtaining records from other districts in this state, not to mention from out of state. For example, I received a record on a student who had some attendance concerns, and yet the previous district sent along no record of the student's actual attendance days and absence days for an entire school year (and this was before the pandemic). So, there is a great need for sharing student information in a confidential and secure manner across the state, and there are models of this in many other states.

However, I also have great concerns about the expertise and capabilities demonstrated by the department of education. This has been attempted in some limited versions in the past, all without meaningful progress or thoughtful execution. To some extent this was not the fault of the individuals working on it, but a matter of resourcing.

I would encourage the legislature to learn more about the complexity and technology requirements of such a system before tasking the department with a project like this. I would also encourage the legislature to understand the implications of the disruption this can cause in potentially changing systems.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration in this matter,

Justin Potts, MS NCSP
School Psychologist 1999-Present and user support and training for district local implementation of the Synergy Special Education information system.
Learning Specialist, Marion County Juvenile Dept. 1994-1999
Former President of the Oregon School Psychologists Association