

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs McIntire and Dobson, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2007. While I fully support investing in literacy, I am concerned that a narrow academic focus and restrictive funding models will unintentionally limit access to high-quality summer and after-school programs for the kids who need them most. Community-based organizations like Boys & Girls Clubs have a proven track record of integrating literacy into engaging, youth-centered programming. But without flexibility in program design and funding access, this bill risks reducing participation and undermining the outcomes we all want to achieve.

At Boys & Girls Clubs of Bend, we see firsthand how summer and after-school programs transform young lives. Our commitment to literacy was recognized when we were selected for an ODE Early Literacy Grant, scoring among the highest applicants in the state. This funding allows us to integrate reading support within a broader youth development framework, ensuring kids stay engaged. But this grant alone does not and could not fund a summer model focused solely on literacy. More importantly, we know that kids need more than just academics to thrive. Summer programs should foster curiosity, confidence, and connection. Literacy is part of that, but so are hands-on learning, real-world skill-building, and enrichment experiences that make learning meaningful.

Research and experience tell us that the most effective summer and after-school programs are the ones kids want to attend. Students who struggle in school are the least likely to sign up for a summer program that feels like more of the same. But when literacy is woven into hands-on projects, mentorship, and exploration, kids show up. They thrive. That is why Boys & Girls Clubs of Bend uses a whole-child approach that blends academics with enrichment, making learning dynamic and engaging.

There is also a financial reality to consider. A rigid, academic-only summer model would be financially unsustainable for community-based organizations like ours. The same staff who support literacy development also lead STEM activities, leadership programs, the arts, and other experiences that help kids grow into well-rounded individuals. When programs are flexible, we can maximize resources and reach more kids. If funding models shift toward strict academic interventions, we lose the efficiency and impact that make summer learning successful.

Investing in Boys & Girls Clubs is a smart economic decision. National research shows that every one dollar invested in Boys & Girls Clubs returns ten dollars and thirty-two cents in economic benefits to Club members, their families, and society. That return comes from better educational outcomes, workforce readiness, and crime prevention. Oregon has an opportunity to invest in summer and after-school learning in a way that truly works by supporting programs that are both research-based and engaging.

I urge the committee to amend HB 2007 to ensure funding flexibility for community-based organizations so that programs like ours can continue to provide high-quality, whole-child programming. Literacy is important, but engagement is everything.

Thank you for your time and for your leadership on this critical issue. I welcome any questions and appreciate your consideration.

Onward, Bess

Bess Goggins
CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of Bend