

Good morning, Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber and members of the Senate Education Committee! My name is Liz Marlia-Stein, and I live in McMinnville and am an active member of OPEN, the Oregon Public Education Network.

I thank you for bringing Senate Bill 1596 up for discussion today. My testimony will surely reveal the need for “play-based learning” in our public schools.

As a dedicated substitute teacher and tutor in Oregon for more than 25 years, I worked with students from grades K-12 and experienced first-hand the well-rounded education our children once had, with a wholesome curriculum designed to make learning fun and encourage curiosity and critical thinking, as well as taking into account the importance of it being developmentally appropriate at each grade level. After shifting the focus of learning to an emphasis on standardized testing, it soon became evident that too many of our students became disengaged and apathetic; and as a result, I saw an increase in anxious, disruptive behavior. Children in Kindergarten were spending much of the day at their desks doing paperwork rather than moving from one learning station to another where they were encouraged to interact with other children and problem-solve together, as I noticed in the higher grades, as well. At the middle school level, which had once incorporated social learning skills, too many students became apathetic and disinterested in their lessons, and in high school, many started skipping classes or dropping out altogether. Lack of attendance and mental health concerns have risen significantly, even before COVID became a problem.

I know we can do better; we must do better, as too many families today have chosen to homeschool or pay for various on-line learning programs; and, as a result, we have seen a decrease in public school funding.

After visiting Southern Oregon’s Rogue Primary Elementary School in Central Point, where Principal Maggie Staley was asked to develop a K-2 play-based curriculum, I saw how much more engaged the children were and excited to learn. Then, I discovered that other schools in Oregon were incorporating “guided play” into their standard curriculum, thanks to Teaching Preschool Partners which introduced play-based learning into elementary grades. The excitement didn’t stop here. Before long, I met Kathy Hirsh Pasek from the Brookings Institute, where a new scientific approach to learning had been introduced in several states throughout our nation. It is called “Active Playful Learning,” and I see that SB 1596 is an important steppingstone to bringing this fundamental play-based curriculum back into our classrooms. Please support this bill for the success of public-school education in Oregon. Thank you!

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