

Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

My name is Soobin Oh, and I'm here today as Co-Director of Teaching Preschool Partners in support of SB 1596.

Teaching Preschool Partners is guided by a vision of a joyful and just education system — one that grows from the wisdom of children. Our mission is to partner with educators and children to ignite playful, inquiry-driven learning in classrooms. At the core of our work is a belief in the brilliance of every child, the professionalism of teachers, and the power of play and curiosity to drive deep learning.

I want to be clear at the outset: **play-based learning — and specifically guided play — is not an abstract idea in Oregon.** It is already happening. Hundreds of teachers across our state are practicing guided play in their classrooms right now.

Over 11 years we've grown from working in two districts to now being in over 30 school districts across 13 counties. I've been struck by how much the movement around play-based learning has grown. The research is reaching the field, and educators and families are increasingly recognizing the need for learning environments that are developmentally appropriate and deeply engaging. We regularly hear from school board members, administrators, teachers, and family members who already understand the benefits of playful learning for Oregon's students and want to see the practices we promote spread across their communities.

I'm speaking today from multiple perspectives — as a nonprofit leader, a member of the Governor's Early Learning Council, a research partner to the national Active Playful Learning study, as a parent, and as an Oregonian. I care DEEPLY about Oregon's youngest children, their families, and the professionals who work with them.

Over the past decade, my work has focused on the intersection of public preschool and elementary education. I've seen firsthand how Oregon's investments in preschool have helped level the playing field so that all children — not just those whose families can afford it — enter elementary school with a strong foundation.

But to see a true return on that investment, those gains must be sustained into the elementary years.

In these last ten years I've seen a disconnect between what is thought to be best practice in preschool and best practice in elementary education.

But the science of learning cuts through that and can bind these disconnected areas of our system together. Play-based learning can create a common set of practices between preschool and elementary professionals.

We are in elementary classrooms where guided play is supported: students are negotiating with peers, managing emotions, navigating group dynamics, planning, creating, and solving problems together. Teachers consistently tell us that academic content is not set aside — it is integrated. Students naturally draw on literacy, math, and content knowledge to make their playful learning successful, and, further, they draw from their diverse lived experiences into play. And when students get to practice their full repertoire of skills and capabilities we see abundant joy in the classroom.

When educators are supported to teach this way, they see a new side of their students — children who show multiple forms of genius, who communicate their thinking in many ways, and who demonstrate the adaptability and creativity needed for an uncertain future.

And yet, educators still worry about compliance as to whether this kind of intentional, play-based instruction counts as instructional time.

That's where SB 1596 matters.

It affirms that intentional, play-based learning counts, and it makes it clear that play is not a departure from learning. It is a rigorous and scientifically backed way of learning when it is practiced with purpose and support.

SB 1596 aligns state policy with what is already working in classrooms across Oregon, protects the return on our early learning investments, and gives educators permission to teach in ways that support how children learn best.

For these reasons, Teaching Preschool Partners strongly supports SB 1596.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Soobin Oh
Co-Director of Teaching Preschool Partners