

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1596

TO: The Oregon Legislative Assembly

FROM: Lauren Adams, Playful Inquiry Collaborator and Materials Specialist

DATE: February 6, 2026

RE: Affirming Play-Based Learning as Vital Instructional Time (Grades K–5)

Honorable Members of the Assembly,

My name is Lauren Adams. I am a 25-year veteran educator and artist currently serving at KairosPDX. I am writing in enthusiastic support of Senate Bill 1596. This permissive legislation provides the necessary clarity to ensure that in Oregon's K–5 classrooms, intentional, play-based learning is recognized for what it truly is: rigorous, foundational instructional time. By clarifying that play-based learning counts toward instructional hours, SB 1596 removes the 'compliance shadow' that often prevents educators from utilizing the most sophisticated learning strategy our species possesses, play.

Play is Not a Break from Instruction—It is Instruction

In my 11 years at Opal School, my current work at KairosPDX, and my early decade of work as an educator in NYC, I have seen that when children are invited to play with ideas through 'intelligent materials'—such as loose parts, clay, blocks and wire—literacy and STEM become tools for inquiry rather than mere tasks. As neurobiology and Harvard's Project Zero's research confirm, children are wired to make meaning through sensing and doing. I have observed students navigate high-level concepts through play:

- **Metacognition:** Cadence (age 7) shared that playing with materials "helps me think about my thinking."
- **Literacy & Narrative:** Amelia (age 8) noted that loose parts "wake up stories... they make their own story sometimes."
- **Mathematical Modeling:** Spencer (age 11) observed that materials "let you see within all the folds of a question because the question becomes an object."

Empowering Educators and Students

Currently, I'm observing teachers that feel a 'compliance anxiety' that forces a false choice between curriculum fidelity of 'real learning' and playful inquiry based learning. I feel that SB 1596 resolves this by acknowledging:

- **Conflict Resolution:** Learned during low-stakes, playful negotiation.
- **Democratic Foundation:** By playing with ideas together, children practice the essential dispositions of a healthy society: curiosity, listening, and collaborative negotiation.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Emotional and cognitive development are inseparable; a child who feels 'heard' through play is a child ready to learn.

At KairosPDX, our culture is anchored in 'Love'—defined as care for the present moment and commitment to long-term success. SB 1596 is not a mandate, it is an invitation for schools to honor children's natural learning strategy of playful inquiry. When we give children the time to play, we tell them we value their strategies for thinking. We are telling them that we are listening

with intention because we believe in their ability to figure it out and we value the enduring habit of success to exhibit grit for learning.

I urge you to support SB 1596 to ensure that every Oregon child has the right to a classroom that functions as a studio for discovery, where instructional time reflects the true, vibrant nature of how children learn best to ensure their success in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Adams

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