

February 22, 2026

House Committee on Education

Dear Honorable Members:

I come to you in fervent support of Senate Bill 1596 regarding "Play-Based Learning." As a Chemistry professor at Mt. Hood Community College, a parent of four and a grandparent of thirteen children, I cannot express enough the importance of a wholesome curriculum that incorporates guided-play, one which would help engage and excite students much more than they experience now. For too many years, our public-school students have experienced a test-driven curriculum that no longer gives them the rich, comprehensive education we once had in our public schools. Because of this, many students are leaving the public-school setting and enrolling in private and online virtual schools, as well as being homeschooled, some of my grandchildren among them.

I volunteer at the public elementary school in my neighborhood, and I see too many students losing interest in school and, as a result, becoming unruly in the classroom. One of my daughters recently pulled her kids out of public school because of the disruption and drama caused by disengaged classmates. Another daughter is contemplating removing her kids because of the amount of time the teachers are using iPads to teach lessons.

In addition to this, I've been teaching college-level chemistry for 25 years and have noticed a drastic decline in my students' academic knowledge and study skills. I hold public schools near and dear to my heart and believe something needs to change. I sincerely believe that play-based learning could be one variable, among many, in solving these problems.

It is my hope that you, as important leaders in our state, will see its value. Some of the money we have invested in testing could certainly pay for the coaching and curriculum already developed and tested. For our children's sake, and the health of our families, it is time we move in a different direction.

Thank You Sincerely,

Bernadette Harnish
611 SE Lovrien Place
Gresham, OR 97080