



Date: March 22, 2017
To: House Education Committee, Chair Doherty and Members
From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations Consultant
RE: *HB 2587 [A student-centered vision of public education in Oregon]*

On behalf of OEA's 44,000 members, I am honored to speak in support of HB 2587, which would revise Oregon's public education mission to be more student-centered and focused on comprehensive educational opportunity.

A year ago, our teachers voted to seek this change because of what they were seeing in their classrooms, schools, and communities. After what was then a full five years of experience with the latest round of reform movements, our educators noticed the consequences of imposing a corporate, non-educator vision of schooling. A perfect storm of high-stakes testing, sloganeering, and low funding had produced a high-pressure environment in which accountability was about arbitrary cut scores and student achievement was defined by yet more arbitrary numbers. Impacts to students included loss of non-core classes, hours and days of over-testing, erasure of such mainstays as middle-school social studies, and even the loss of elementary recess for the youngest students in some high-poverty elementary schools.

We read a lot about overcrowded classrooms, low graduation rates, and shortened school years – metrics of educational quantity. We hear much less about these other impacts – consequences to educational quality. Vivid to our educators are the stories of kids who feel like failures because they are labeled. Of students who have nowhere to go in the summer months, little to eat, and who slip backward, losing valuable educational ground year after year. Of young people quitting the system that had quit them years before.

Our teachers told us to make it stop.

In researching the genesis of 40-40-20, it soon became clear that the corporate world had done a masterful job of embedding the language, vision, and metrics they wanted in this latest attempt to change the subject when we argued for more investment in public education. They wrote white papers, funded conferences for elected leaders in education and government, held summits, and literally invented a new language to describe their concepts. From all this national effort, Oregon was not shielded. Oregon Education Investment Board. Achievement Compacts. Rudy Crew. And 40-40-20.

We also rediscovered a little-known K-12 mission statement already in Oregon's statutes that predates the 2011 invention (ORS 326.011). It calls for the same thing parents, teachers, administrators, and most community members want: a comprehensive, well-rounded education for all students. Its vision is not solely workforce readiness, though that is one goal. It also calls for the creation of good citizens and of lovers of lifelong learning. It makes room for the poet, the welder, the archaeologist, the engineer, and yes, the child who dreams of a career in the military. We have updated that vision to reflect the aspirations of students themselves, and not just of the world that will one day employ them.

Additionally, we took on the notion of the arbitrary 40-40-20 statute, which, though it calls for a 100 percent high school graduation rate, is found in the higher education statute. ORS 350.014 is not only ambitious, it exceeds the post-secondary attainment rate of the best-funded, academically achieving states in the nation. It also exceeds the expectation of all experts on what the workforce needs of the year 2025 will be, which would best be described as 30-30-40. Imagine coming out of college with that newly minted degree, loads of debt, and facing a workforce that is 10 percent over-educated for the jobs available. It is magical thinking to assume that a surfeit of students with post-

graduate educations will entice companies to locate here and pay them what they are worth. It is almost cruel to set these students up for a future of debt and unemployment.

Looking forward, *The Every Student Succeeds Act* (the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) offers Oregon an additional clue that HB 2587 would be moving us in a better direction.

As with Oregon's reforms, No Child Left Behind also caused schools to narrow the curriculum to focus solely on reading and math at the expense of other subjects. NCLB's test-and-punish framework meant dire consequences for schools failing to meet unachievable testing goals. The financial crisis of 2008 compounded this trend as school districts facing massive budget cuts had to cut staff, close programs, and raise class sizes. This national mistake, coupled with the Oregon reform detour, eroded student access to a well-rounded education.

Replacing the ill-fated NCLB, ESSA places an emphasis on providing access to a well-rounded education for all students, defined as:

Courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience.'

The Oregon Department of Education *Draft Overview of Oregon's State Plan* recognizes a well-rounded education as one of four opportunities for Oregon under ESSA. It reads:

Opportunity Two: Extending the Promise of a Well-Rounded Education

While ESSA defines a well-rounded education to include a wide variety of subjects and areas of study, Oregon believes a well-rounded education moves beyond the courses students take, and into the essential knowledge and skills students are learning in those courses. We know that a well-rounded education provides the knowledge and skills to live, learn, work, create, and contribute. It also ensures that each and every student is known, heard, and supported. Our goal is to establish and actualize a definition of well-rounded education that focusses on the whole student, the learning experiences they are given, the knowledge and skills they learn, and the beliefs and attributes they develop. (p.2)

<http://www.oregon.gov/ode/rules-and-policies/ESSA/Documents/FINAL%20OVERVIEW%20State%20Plan%202.24.17.pdf>

The Consolidated State Plan Under ESSA details a well-rounded education even further, and this section constitutes a large portion of the state plan (29 pages of a 110-page document). In short, Oregon is on a thoughtful path to replace jargon with meaningful educational progress. This bill aligns with that work.

One final word about OEA's call for a more expansive public education vision: Among the hundreds of pages of promotional material for 40-40-20 that I found and reviewed, none was more prescient than the words of Travis Reindl, Program Director in Education for the National Governors' Association, who shared his "essential ingredients" in a document entitled "*From Goal to Reality: 40-40-20*". He wrote that the state should have:

Goals that are ambitious but realistic, or they will feed disillusionment and skepticism more than optimism and ownership...[that are] rooted in realities...not a one size fits all approach....[That are] cognizant of the relationship to the economy of Oregon....[That] harmonize over time, with an openness to review and adjust when necessary as change occurs inside the education, political, and economic structure.

With HB 2587, you have just such an opportunity – to make the adjustments needed to ensure that 100 percent of Oregon students have access to a well-rounded education and to the post-secondary pathways that mesh with their needs and ambitions.