

Dear Committee Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering this testimony in support of SB 692/ HB 2939.

I have worked for over 20 years at a variety of levels in dropout prevention and reengagement both at the local, state and national level. I strongly support passage of SB 692 or HB 2939. It is an equity imperative that we begin to serve and honor all of our young people in Oregon. This includes our young people who leave our public schools without a high school diploma or its equivalency (i.e. GED). In order to improve our outcomes we must work to do two things at once:

- a) prevent students from dropping out by putting better engagement and student support programming in place and
- b) reengage those who have left school.

Without this two pronged approach, we cannot improve equitable outcomes for all students. It is time we stop putting our heads in the sand that prevention efforts alone will address the problems faced by many of our young people every year.

- More than 6,000 Oregon students leave high school each year without a diploma.
- Current accountability policy creates disincentives for school districts to re-enroll out-of-school youth.
- The disconnected youth population is overrepresented by underserved race/ethnicities, the economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners, homeless youth, and youth with disabilities.
- Young people who do not earn a high school diploma or GED are significantly more likely to face unemployment, incarceration, and even shorter lifespans.
- Based on similar laws in Washington and Colorado, this bill (SB 692/HB 2939) will lead to the creation of more opportunities across the state for out-of-school youth to re-enroll in high school.
- Currently, in our alternative education policy, districts have the capacity to serve students using state school fund dollars up to the age of 21 regardless of whether they have an IEP or not. We need to leverage this ability with policy that removes the dis-incentives for districts to reengage students.

Please consider passage of this important legislation as another piece of the overall puzzle to serve every young person in our student and ensure that each individual has opportunity and access to not only a high school diploma or GED but also to the array of postsecondary career development opportunities that a secondary education affords them.

Sincerely,

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*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. - Nelson Mandela*