To: Senate Education Committee

From: Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D.

Re: SB 282

Date: March 27, 2019

There are some reasons to be concerned about social media use by young people. I am not entirely convinced that, along with everything else the legislature is piling on ODE and OHA with insufficient funding, that SB 282 is needed. However, if you decide to pursue this legislation, there is a change I would recommend.

I have been writing to you on a number of bills. But I figure you pretty much have no idea who I am. And since I am not a lobbyist or with a well known organization, and because my background does relate specifically to this bill, I am going to take a brief sojourne and tell you of my past, so you can put my comments related to this legislation and others into perspective. Not all who wander are lost--irregardless of the fact that many times we may appear to be.

I have a B.S. in elementary and early childhood education from U of Utah, a M.S. in special education from U of Oregon, and a J.D. from Willamette University. I taught a special education class of children with emotional challenges in Medford, burned out and went to law school, set up practice in a field that focused in part on computer law and copyright, was instrumental in forming the Technology Association of Oregon, was frequently asked to present to teachers on these new technologies (this was in the 80's -- era of 5 inch floppies), got far more excited about new technologies in school and so left law practice to focus on educational technology.

Then, the Internet started coming into schools. (Yes, I am that old.) I worked with the technology director at Lane ESD on establishing the first countywide K-12 Internet access program in the country. He then moved to Salem Keizer and working with Willamette ESD, retained me to write a plan of action for an ESD led Internet service there. This plan that I wrote became the basis for the Oregon Public Education Network. I followed this by working with many ESDs throughout the state to help over 40% of Oregon's districts write their first technology literacy plan. (This is why I strongly support the legislation from the Oregon School Safety Taskforce setting up a distributed approach to support school districts in addressing the social and emotional challenges of Oregon's students.)

During this time, there was a huge technology summit in Portland. Governor Goldschmidt spoke to the group. He entertained questions. I asked the first. I asked, "Governor, we have established a dedicated network connection for every tavern in this state to the lottery, why can't we establish a dedicated network connection for every school?" The room exploded in applause. The state's technology director took this on as a challenge. The telecommunications contract for the lottery was rebid in a way that allowed for significantly reduced Internet access for the schools. For a while, I was known as "the woman who asked the question."

As the Internet came into schools, I started focusing on issues of youth risk, involving technologies, and also implicating legal issues. I have been "dancing" in this three ring circus since that time. (Actually, my son dances with Danceability International -- you would far rather watch him dance.)

I wrote the first book ever published on cyberbullying, Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Cruelty, Threats, and Distress (Research Press 2007). I also wrote Cyber Safe Kids, Cyber Savvy Teens (Helping Young People Learn To Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly (Jossey-Bass, 2007) and Cyber Savvy: Embracing Digital Safety and Civility (Corwin, 2012).

I tried to encourage schools to do more to help young people engage in safe and responsible Internet use and even created an innovative student led program for this. However, schools -- at that time and now -- generally provide one hour of training to meet their responsibility under the Children's Internet Protection Act and are not really interested in anything more. Neither responsible use of digital media nor effective social emotional skills are in the Common Core or on any test and testing has sadly become the only focus of schools. I an currently working on a project with the Bahrain Telecommunications Regulation Authority that will introduce an innovative positive social norms approach to encourage positive digital media use.

Around 2012, I shifted my focus to bullying prevention -- bullying in any venue, face to face or using digital media. I am the author of two new books, Engage Students to Embrace Civility (for school leaders) and Be Positively Powerful: An Empowerment Plan for Teens Who Are Bullied or Harassed. These are both self-published and are on Amazon.

Sadly, school leaders really are not all that interested in new strategies to better address bullying either. This has been the experience of all of the really solid bullying prevention experts I am connected with across the country. I have a strong opinion that a huge underlying reason for this is the bullying prevention statutes that are now in every state. I sent you a huge document explaining this, and have some suggestions on how Oregon could revise its bullying prevention statute to support a more effective response to serious, persistent, or pervasive bullying or harassment.

However, I am not predicting any success. Oregon's bullying prevention statute has been in place for decades. There is zero evidence it is effective. The rate of bullying has not declined -- actually appears to be increasing. School leaders are clearly doing what they have been told to do under the statute. What they have been told to do is part of the problem. But if they just keep doing what they have been told to do they will achieve better results. Right? Insanity.

With respect to SB 282, there are concerns associated with the overuse of digital media by young people. There are chapters in both of my earlier digital safety books on Keep Your Life in Balance.

I do want to warn you against reliance on research conducted by Dr. Twenge. Dr. Twenge has been frequently quoted in news articles, promoting her book, with her findings that use of social media is what is fueling the increased mental health concerns of teens.

The findings she presents as based on her research are bunk. She maintains that because correlation shows an increase in youth use of digital media and an increase in mental health challenges of youth, the use of digital media has caused the mental health concerns. What she found was a "correlation." What she is maintaining is "causation." Any solid researcher would ward against this.

Further, her conclusions are contrary to those found in a recent study by Pew Research Center. This study that asked teens demonstrated that academic pressures were at the top of the list in causing their anxiety -- far over all other pressures. https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/.

Note that the significant increase in teen emotional concerns has coincided with the introduction of the Common Core and Smarter Balance test. The quest to improve student achievement by maintaining a focus on test scores has clearly failed. At what point do we admit this has failed or are we going to continue to do the same thing over and over and somehow expect that sometime in the future something good might benefit?

I would agree with the fact that use of social media is having an impact -- that is both beneficial and potentially harmful. And certainly, I still strongly maintain that is is exceptionally important for young people to keep their lives in balance and to get outside to play and engage in in-person gatherings with friends.

However, I am not convinced that a study by ODE and OHA would have any positive contribution to this -- or that materials distributed by ODE to parents would have any positive impact. I have included a document I wrote for parents in 2012.

My analysis of some data from Bahrain provides helpful insight. In a survey they conducted in 2015, eighty-two percent (82.4%) of teens reported they knew more (45.5%) or as much (36.9%) about the Internet than their parents or caregivers. Only 36% of teens thought their Internet use should be supervised by parents or care givers. As I am telling the Bahrain folks, this must translate to an understanding that most teens are not going to listen to what adults have to say about digital media. We have to use other strategies to influence young people to keep their lives in balance.

However, if this legislation is to proceed there is a hugely important concern that is missing from what should be addressed. This could be "read in" to the language, but perhaps the language should be stronger.

I call your attention to a strong movement among educational instruction providers and the technology industry called "personalized learning." One of the reasons for the creation of the Common Core was to allow for the creation of glorified drill and practice software programs that schools could acquire and simply "plug" students in to their computers to have them learn. By having common standards, this allowed for the creation of this software.

You can see some news stories on this here:

https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rural-idaho-school-district-transforms-education-through-technology/

https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/politics-government/state-politics/article222224730.html

It is highly probable that there are pressures on Oregon school districts to implement this kind of approach. **This is absolutely NOT the direction we want our schools to proceed.** There are wonderful ways that increasing the use of technology for real world learning projects can be very, very helpful. There are some ways that use of personalized learning software systems can support students in acquiring some skills. The use of adaptive learning technologies for students with disabilities can be very helpful. But the kind of program implemented in Wilder Idaho is **exceptionally damaging**.

There is a very old, but still highly relevant, book by Jane Healy that addressed these concerns. Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds -- and What We Can Do About It. What she discovered in her analysis was that use of computers in schools with students at a higher SES level was generally highly creative -- the computers were used in project based learning as tools for students to research their world and create innovative expressions of their findings.

On the other hand, use of computers with lower income students was primarily focused on "plugging" the students in to drill and practice software.

If this bill proceeds, I would STRONGLY encourage the addition of language that would specifically direct ODE to focus on this use of digital media in the report findings.