

February 3, 2020

Chair Doherty and Members of the House Committee on Education:

I am a student at the University of Oregon and I respectfully request the committee's support of House Bill 4132, the Oregon Student Health Survey Bill. To work towards equity in health and education, we need to understand the scope of issues facing our youth and be responsive to their needs. This can be done by ensuring that our health education standards are implemented, which include LGBTQ+ inclusivity; consent and healthy relationships; sexual activity and HIV/AIDS knowledge; child abuse prevention; bullying and school safety. The Oregon Student Health Survey is the only source of statewide data on school climate and the health & well-being of Oregon students.

In an OHA survey of all 197 school districts, only 35 school districts reported having the required plan of instruction for sex ed. We must support this survey to ensure we are collecting the most accurate data about teen health possible so we can make informed decisions. For example, although Oregon law requires sex education curricula that is developmentally appropriate and LGBTQ+ inclusive, local policies and inconsistent laws throughout the state make it difficult to fully implement the required curricula. I strongly believe that all young people and communities, no matter where they live, have the right to the information and skills they need to protect their health and plan their futures. However, this is not currently possible because of the limited resources provided to the OHA and ODE. We must step up to support this survey more fully.

There are several reasons that it is important to me that Oregon's public school students have access to comprehensive, age-appropriate, and LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual health education. First, sex education is widely supported by a majority of Americans and by the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. In fact, more than 90% of parents support sex education in both middle and high school. Further, young people need access to information and resources that include consent and healthy relationships — starting well before college and well before they become sexually active — to help them understand how to ask for consent, respect personal boundaries, and learn how to say and receive a “no.” We need accurate data and a well-supported health survey in order to know where the needs for sex education and issues such as rising STI rates are in each community around the state. Supporting HB 4132 gets us closer to this critical information.

When I was in middle and high school, I was lucky enough to receive great sex education from my teacher at Portland Public Schools. However, it breaks my heart to hear that so many students in Oregon are not as lucky as I was, and are receiving extremely inadequate sex education. My high quality education has impacted my life and empowered me to make my own sexual decisions. Because of the great education I received about safe sex and consent, I have both comprehensive knowledge about my body and a strong sense of control over my life.

Voting yes on House Bill 4132 would give educators and health partners the necessary data to support the health, well-being and academic achievement, and empowerment of Oregon youth.

Please codify and fund the Oregon Student Health Survey and provide the critical resources necessary to help schools and communities make data-informed decisions about the health and well-being of their students now and for years to come.

Sincerely,

Kat Abrams
Eugene, OR