

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 4140. This bill addresses three critical issues in our schools: student health and safety, academic success and school/parent communication. Oregon must take proactive steps to better meet the needs of students recovering from brain injuries.

This bill will address student health and safety

When I was 16, I landed on my head in a football game and blacked out. When I awoke, I had an incredible headache and my immediate concern was when I could get back into the game. I am thankful that there were procedures in place for medical staff to evaluate me, and that they were cautious and took my concussion very seriously. When I returned to school the following Monday, there was never a discussion for how this would impact my academics. Bright light bothered me, I was sluggish, and I had a hard time focusing. I wish my school had the same concern for my brain injury in the classroom that they had for me on the football field. Sadly, they did not. This bill will push schools to address brain injuries for students. From my experience, I can tell you that my recovery in the classroom was much more challenging than my recovery on the field. I wish HB 4140 was a law when I was growing up, because that concussion affected me that whole academic year.

This bill will improve our academic services

As a former baseball coach, I was required to learn all about concussion protocols and how to protect brain injured players. However, when I was a high school teacher there was no concussion training or systems in place to help me best serve students in the classroom with these issues. I can recall specific students in my classes who experienced concussions in sports or in car accidents, and I had no idea how to best serve them. I worked with our administration and special education staff to create a plan moving forward. However, for students without an existing individualized education plan (IEP) this was very challenging. We need a standardized approach to serving these students in our classrooms.

This bill will improve school/parent communication

Communication between teachers, school administrators, and parents is fundamental to the academic success of a student. Our special education system has prioritized creating formal lines of communication where various professionals meet and discuss student needs. For brain injuries, there is no formal mechanism to facilitate this discussion. This bill will create a form to make sure that all relevant parties have the requisite information and have input into a plan of how to best serve the student moving forward.

I have spent my career in education: as a high school teacher, a school board member, and now as a professor of educational policy. I spend my days thinking about how to improve our schools. But policy solutions for supporting teachers, school accountability, and school funding are empty if we are not meeting the basic needs of our students. As a state, we recognize that brain injuries should be taken seriously on the athletic fields, and we need to take similar steps to address brain injuries in our classrooms. I strongly urge the passage of HB 4140.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns regarding my support for this bill.

Sincerely,

Andy Saultz  
Assistant Professor of Educational Policy