

Senate Committee on Education
Senate Bill 52

Chair Dembrow and Committee Members,

Thank you for hearing this bill. I am the mother of a gay child. He is currently a senior and has spent his entire education in Oregon public schools. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 52.

I am trusting that because you are on this committee you care about the education of all Oregon youth. I trust that you believe all children should feel safe and be provided the best possible environment for learning.

My son and I have reviewed the report prepared by the Oregon Department of Education on the experience and needs of LGBTQ2AI+ students. It absolutely reflects his experience. I hope you have read that report and that you will hear from students and parents about their experiences. I am going to take a little different focus here.

I would like to share my thoughts on two points. Why schools should be involved in supporting LGBTQ2AI+ students and why a state plan is critical.

I have heard arguments that schools need to focus on education and not equity and social support. I agree schools should focus on education, but this requires assisting students to engage in education. This takes equity and social support. If they can't focus in school on class work, they are not provided the same opportunity as others. In middle school, in the halls between classes...every day...between every class...my son was barraged with disparaging comments related to sexual and gender identity. Sometimes directed at him and sometimes at others. He also heard racist and sexist comments, but that is for another time. So, the break was not a break, and when he arrived in class, his head was full. He felt sad, angry, fearful and full of anxiety. He needed to brace himself for the next break. So focusing on the teacher's words was hard. He couldn't focus on in-class work. He was working, but not getting very far, it slowed him down. Because he didn't get far, he was stuck doing more homework than most kids. And because he was behind in during class, he didn't know the questions he had until he was home. So, he didn't have the benefit of the teacher's help. If he did need help, some work would be incorrect or late so that he could get help. Because he was sitting in class working, all of this often went unnoticed by the teachers. He was always worried about asking for help and asking for help was focused on the schoolwork. He never felt heard in regard to the bullying and homophobic language.

To summarize, here are the ways my son's education was impacted by this daily barrage.

- He couldn't focus on the teacher to follow the lesson.
- He lost the opportunity for direct help from the teacher.
- He had more homework and less of a break from the work.
- He felt bad for not knowing how to do the work, even though he was listening and trying.
- He went unnoticed.

Had this behavior had been stopped, then these challenges would have been lifted for him.

A state plan and its implementation is critical to successfully create a safe environment for LGBTQ2AI+ students. I understand the value of teacher, principal and district autonomy. Every classroom, school and region is different. However, the capacity of all of those folks is limited. They are managing incredible loads. So even if teachers, principals and districts have the intention to make schools safe and welcome, they don't have the research, the methods, and the funding at their fingertips. A state plan provides this structure to support our school staff and boards at all levels. It provides the guidance, recommended trainings, methods of engagement and communication, and funding to allow teachers, principals, and districts to better serve all students.

Please support Senate Bill 52 and help all of our students have a chance to focus on education.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kuri Gill