



**Date:** April 7, 2021  
**To:** Senate Education Committee, Chair Dembrow and Members  
**From:** Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations  
**RE:** *SB 356 [School Nurse Specialist Position]*

On behalf of OEA's 41,000 members, including our school nurses, it is my honor to testify in support of SB 356, which will profoundly improve the ability of our experts in school nursing to impact policy, processes, and practice.

Currently, there is a consultant on school nursing in the Oregon Health Authority whose focus is on health policy in general, but not on issues in the education setting. At the Department of Education, there has been a half-time, limited-duration person whose focus is Health Education, but this person is not a nurse. In the limited role of the incumbent, there is not the time or expertise to accomplish the important work a School Nurse Specialist could: providing technical assistance, incorporating best practice protocols and standards, addressing health-related equity issues, and providing medical expertise on the elements of the student experience that ties health to learning.

Given that even before COVID-19, our students were suffering a rise in trauma leading to the disrupted learning crisis, and now that our schools are reopening to a student body whose emotional health has surely been forever impacted by this devastating year, school nursing support for appropriate services has never been more important. Yet, due to chronic education underfunding, Oregon has the worst school nurse-to-student ratios in the country. Though SB 356 does not address this problem directly, a single state-level, full-time nurse position at the ODE could help with the kinds of policy and process considerations that help school districts and ESDs build in appropriate interventions and supports. It is also a vastly more affordable next baby step in meeting our students' special education, physical health, and mental health needs in the school setting.

We are aware that money is tight, and that the co-chairs' budget framework already is proposing a funding level that will result in cuts across the state, but we also believe that the resources exist to both fund schools to the no-cuts level AND add this critical statewide nursing support position. Our universal desire to improve the lives of our students as well as to boost their academic and career paths is reason enough to support this bill and send it on to Ways and Means to be considered among the state's greatest priorities.

Thank you for considering our perspective.