



February 15, 2022

TO: House Education Committee  
FR: Superintendent Tim Sweeney  
RE: SB 1521 Testimony

Good Afternoon Chair Alonso Leon and members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Tim Sweeney and I am the Superintendent of the Coquille School District on the southern Oregon coast. Coquille School District serves 1330 students in grades preK-12. I also have the honor of serving as the President of the Oregon Association of School Executives (OASE). I am here today to ask for your support for Senate Bill 1521, which provides basic employment protections for Oregon's school district superintendents. We developed this bill together with our partners at the Oregon School Boards Association with one shared goal: help provide leadership stability in support of our students and communities.

**Stability in Schools is Best For Students and Superintendent Turnover is Skyrocketing**

Staff stability is best for students and current turnover among Oregon's superintendents is alarmingly high due to a number of factors - increasingly polarized politics within local communities and boards, an overwhelming amount of work serving students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic, a general staffing shortage and retirements, and the fact that superintendents can be dismissed "without cause" during their terms of employment.

Between 2018-19 and 2021-22, there were 127 superintendent vacancies in Oregon, an average of almost 32 vacancies per school year. For the current school year, there were 43 superintendent vacancies. And so far, there are already 35 vacancies – with more expected – heading into the 2022-23 school year. This is out of a total of 216 positions in Oregon.

In some communities, our superintendents and school boards are facing a backlash that is unlike anything experienced before. Politics have distracted leaders from centering the needs of their students, focusing on equitable educational outcomes or implementing legally required public health and safety measures. Our superintendents need basic employment protections, just like teachers, principals and other licensed K-12 educators. Under current law, superintendents are potentially risking their careers and livelihoods for following state or federal law, rules, and regulations.

Passage of Senate Bill 1521 will allow boards and superintendents to collaborate better and focus on providing educational leadership, stability and continuity for our students, staff, and communities without superintendents working in fear of losing their jobs over political disagreements that are outside their control.



**SB 1521 Provides Basic Employment Protections To Statute For Superintendents**

The legislation includes the following statutory changes:

1. Prohibiting school district boards from ordering superintendents to ignore or violate state and federal law, Oregon Administrative Rule or any emergency directive or executive order that applies to school districts and education service districts;
2. Protections for superintendents from being fired or disciplined for following these same rules or laws; and
3. Explicitly requiring both the board and superintendent to agree to any “without cause” termination language in contracts, and requiring a minimum of one year’s notice for a superintendent to be fired “without cause.”

I am pleased to be joined by my colleagues Dr. Danna Diaz and Dr. Sue Rieke Smith who will share some of our reasons for bringing this legislation forward. Thank you for your time today.