

To: House Committee on Education  
From: Gene Eakin, PhD – Oregon State University and Oregon Department of Education  
Comprehensive School Counseling Program Content Development Team  
RE: Support for HB 2656, Elevate Student Voice Act

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Hudson and members of the committee–

My name is Dr. Gene Eakin and I am here today representing a team of counselor educators from Oregon State to express my support for House Bill 2656, the Elevate Student Voice Act.

The Oregon Department of Education this past year contracted with the counselor education program at Oregon State University to develop a course to be put online through the Willamette ESD. The purpose of the course is to assist school districts in developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs as specified in Oregon Administrative Rule 581-022-2060. Though this administrative rule has been in existence now for over 25 years, it is estimated that fewer than 20% of the 197 districts in Oregon have a comprehensive school counseling program that complies with the OAR. I am sure you agree with our belief that *All students have the right to equitable access to a school counseling program that promotes academic, career, social/ emotional, and community involvement development and improves student outcomes for all students, including students historically and currently marginalized by the education system.*

One of the first steps in the development of a comprehensive school counseling program is to conduct an assessment of students' counseling needs. The data collected by the administration of these two surveys is exactly the type of data that the comprehensive school counseling teams in districts and schools need to have available to determine the program outcomes the counselors should be prioritizing. In the course we are developing, we direct district teams to analyze the data provided by these two surveys and, yet, only now did I become aware that 32% of the districts in Oregon were administering these surveys to their students. This poses a significant barrier to school counseling teams in their identification of student counseling needs as well as a barrier to their advocating for the counseling needs of their students. In the 2023 Mental Health America Report, Oregon ranked at the very bottom of the 51 states and districts in meeting the mental health needs of our students. Administering these two surveys will provide data for teams at all levels to better advocate for and address the needs of Oregon's students.

Thank you for your time today and I encourage the committee to vote YES on HB 2656.

Gene Eakin, PhD  
Oregon State University and Oregon Department of Education Comprehensive School  
Counseling Program Content Development Team