

Overview

SB 3 amends ORS to include one credit of future planning as a requirement for an Oregon high school diploma. Future planning is defined, in part, in SB 3 as providing guidance on “seeking assistance, including accessing community resources and acting as a self-advocate for mental, physical and financial well-being”

Testimony

As a former middle school and high school teacher I have seen several instances of health, resource, home economic, and financial literacy teachers and classrooms attempt to tackle this type of instruction to better prepare their students for the future. At the two separate school districts where I have worked, the school district I attended as a student, and many of the school districts in Oregon where my colleagues serve community resources regarding mental, physical, and financial well-being have been found quite lacking especially resources for LGBTQ youth.

It has been my experience that many school districts either explicitly or implicitly urge teachers to shy away from sharing such LGBTQ information and resources as they are concerned parents will misconstrue this instruction as “indoctrinating” their children. I myself got in hot water with my principal, superintendent, and two irate parents who were quite alarmed simply because I defined the suffix “homo-“, in class, as it related to learning the science term “homeostasis”.

In addition to many school districts suppressing the teaching of anything related to LGBTQ information or resources some school districts do not share LGBTQ related community resources because they believe there are not any LGBTQ students in the schools. There are, I was one. I know many who were who did not get the resources they needed because school districts assumed they were straight. We must do better for our students, for all of our students.

Concern

My concern with SB 3 in its current form is that it does not define a minimum requirement for what is included in “community resources” as it pertains to mental and physical well-being for LGBTQ youth.

In 2022 the Trevor Project conducted a LGBTQ nationwide mental health survey, some of the key findings are listed below:

- 1) 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously consider attempting suicide in the past year.
- 2) 18% of children ages 13-17 attempted suicide in the past year.
- 3) Nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide and LGBTQ youth of color reported higher rates than their white peers.
- 4) LGBTQ youth who found their school to be LGBTQ-affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide.
- 5) 60% of LGBTW youth who wanted mental health care in the past year were not able to get it. I might argue that is because they were not taught about resources in school.

To compare, according to the United Health Foundation, 18.8% of high school students seriously considered attempting suicide and 8.9 % actually attempted suicide during a similar timeframe.

Suffice to say, LGBTQ youth are at a far greater risk of mental health issues and therefore need resources to address those issues. However, they are regularly forced to sit through classes that only largely pertain to their straight counterparts. Furthermore, it is sickening that so many school districts will deliberately work to ensure that this demographic of students are not made aware of resources available to them.

Proposal

With all the concerns listed above, I would ask that the Senate Committee on Education consider an amendment to SB 3 which would outline a minimum obligatory educational requirement for what is meant by providing guidance to students on “accessing community resources and acting as a self-advocate for mental, physical and financial well-being” as it pertains to LGBTQ youth.

I would ask that the committee clearly indicate in SB 3 a stipulation which requires all schools and learning institutions, which accept public money, to include comprehensive LGBTQ mental and physical well-being resources in their “future planning” curriculum as outlined in this bill.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/teen_suicide