

March 17, 2023

House Committee on Education  
900 Court St NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Neron and Members of the Committee:

I write in strong support of HB 3584. At the beginning of February my 12-year-old son, a seventh grader, was involved in a lockdown at his middle school—an all-too-common occurrence in our modern world. What was unusual about this lockdown is that it was abrupt, and the terminology used to announce it was consistent with that used to indicate that an outside intruder had gained access to the building.

My son's teacher took swift action, locking the door, closing the window blinds, and directing the students to hide beneath their desks. Hearing doors slamming outside of his classroom, my son feared the worst. I didn't fully grasp the level of fear and panic he experienced until that evening when my wife showed me the text messages he sent her during the lockdown.

***"I might not be coming home, surprise lockdown."***

***"Pray for me."***

***"If I die, here are my last words: 'I hope the world is better with me in it than without.'"***

As a parent, your heart sinks. Lockdowns are a reality, but without knowing the circumstances that cause them, there is no way to help set our children's minds at ease. My pre-teen son thought his story might end that day, at the hands of an outside intruder, in a second story middle school classroom. There was nothing I could say to make it better.

I emailed the school principal that evening, asking if a note to families with information about the lockdown would be forthcoming. I received no reply, and I received no message from the school or school district. In fact, a subsequent email to the district the following week was also ignored, and it's now been 38 days (and counting) since I filed a public records request.

I understand that lockdowns have become routine in our schools, and I'm thankful for the systematic safety procedures that are designed to protect our children. Systematic *communication* procedures after these events occur, like those required in HB 3584, would go a long way to equip parents and families with the knowledge and information they need to help their children process some potentially frightening and anxiety-inducing events, as best as possible. Passing HB 3584 ensures that student mental health is prioritized along with their physical safety.

Putting these basic procedures in place at the state level provides an important consistency in the requirement to communicate with families. Notably, the bill leaves the actual implementation very open at the district and school level, so that individual districts and schools can communicate the basic required information in the formats and pathways that work best for their students and families.

The event that caused the lockdown at my son's school was probably much ado about nothing. Fortunately, most lockdowns are. I'd have done anything to be able to tell my son that shortly after the event, so that he could go back to worrying about more typical 12-year-old things, and not the threats of harm and violence that increasingly loom in our children's minds. HB 3584 ensures that families are able to do just that, and I urge you to support the legislation.

Sincerely,

Eric Chambers  
Portland

