



March 4, 2025

OCCYSHN
Oregon Center for Children and
Youth with Special Health Needs

Dear Chair Fredrick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

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e occyshn@ohsu.edu
w www.occyshn.org

I am writing on behalf of the Oregon Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Needs (OCCYSHN) to express our support for SB315 and its efforts to better understand chronic absenteeism and improve attendance policies for Oregon's students. Children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN) face unique barriers to regular school attendance, making them disproportionately affected by policies related to absenteeism. As Oregon's Title V public health agency for CYSHCN, we are committed to strengthening systems that serve children and youth with special health needs, and their families.

Mail code CDRC
707 SW Gaines St
Portland, OR 97239

CYSHCN are those who have or are at risk for physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional conditions, requiring more health and related services than their peers. Approximately **1 in 5 children in Oregon** have special health care needs. According to the 2022-23 National Survey of Children's Health, **almost 20% of Oregon CYSHCN miss 11 or more school days per year**. This is **3 times to rate of their peers**, and it puts them at higher risk of worsening chronic absenteeism and even unenrollment.

CYSHCN experience numerous barriers that hinder regular school attendance, including:

- **Health complications** such as chronic and prolonged illness, compromised immune systems, frequent medical visits and hospitalizations.
- **Travel for specialized pediatric care** that often requires out-of-town appointments during school hours.
- **Lack of trained school staff** to meet their medical needs when assigned personnel are unavailable, which can lead to schools suggesting that a child stays home.
- **Parental concerns about safety and care**, leading families to keep their child home.

In all cases when a student with special health needs is unable to attend school, **they would be marked absent** – making them disproportionately vulnerable to being flagged for chronic absenteeism and being unenrolled after 10 consecutive absences.

We understand how important regular attendance is for Oregon's students. As you consider this bill, we urge you to consider the following:

- **Health-related absences** – When considering how districts record and respond to student absences, acknowledge and be responsive to the fact that many student absences are related to health conditions.



- **Data collection** – Ensure that data on chronic absenteeism is consistently coded within and between districts and disaggregated to identify the rates and causes of absenteeism specifically among CYSHCN.
- **Collaboration with families** – Families of CYSHCN, like all parents, want their children to be in school and often feel singled out and blamed when their child misses school due to health-related reasons.
- **Consultation with health care providers when reviewing and making recommendations** – Child health specialists, such as school nurses and pediatricians, have unique perspectives into health-related needs and can provide valuable insights into chronic absenteeism for CYSHCN.

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We appreciate your commitment to improving school attendance for Oregon's students. CYSHCN face unique challenges that must be considered when shaping chronic absenteeism policies. We thank you for your work and dedication to the students of Oregon and thank you for considering children and youth with special health care needs as you vote on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen M. Benson".

Karen Benson, MA
Health and Education Project Manager
Oregon Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

A handwritten signature in black ink that appears to read "Benjamin Hoffman".

Benjamin Hoffman MD, FAAP
Immediate Past President, American Academy of Pediatrics
Professor of Pediatrics, Doernbecher Children's Hospital, OHSU
Director, Oregon Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

Source:

Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. Interactive Data Query: National Survey of Children's Health (2022-present). Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). Retrieved 02/25/2025 from <http://www.childhealthdata.org>