

Statement of Brandina Lancaster in support of House Bill 3007

Dear Members of the House Committee on Education:

I'm writing to communicate my strong support of HB 3007.

HB 3007 will help students who are recovering from brain injuries by requiring schools to provide immediate, appropriate, person-centered, academic, behavioral, social, emotional, and physical accommodations to ensure that the student has the best possible recovery, while continuing to make academic progress.

I am the parent of a child who suffered a concussion and was not given immediate temporary accommodations. Unfortunately, at the time of her brain injury immediate temporary accommodations were not required, only suggested. It was left to the discretion of the school administration, most of whom had little to no understanding of short term or long-term implications of a concussion on a student's academic, social, and physical life. HB 3007 has the potential to change that for Oregon students, making immediate, temporary accommodations after a brain injury a requirement instead of an option.

Before her brain injury my daughter was average to advance in all areas of developmental and academics. She had good attendance, above average academic performance (honor courses, 4.28 GPA, advanced reading levels). She participated in academic clubs such as Odyssey of the Mind, MESA, and county level science fairs, frequently winning awards. She was highly engaged with peers and social activities, a leader. In addition to a full academic schedule, she played basketball, football, and wrestled. Outside of school she painted, did wildlife photography, worked part time and was highly involved with family activities. Prior to her injury she was university bound, wanting to study Law. Had my daughter been given accommodations immediately after her injury, she would most likely be away at college today, but she was not.

Since she was not immediately accommodated, within weeks of her injury she had a rapid drop in grades because she couldn't make up work she had missed after the injury AND keep up with current classwork and homework. Her peers began to tease her because she had fallen so far behind in only weeks and was struggling to be in the classroom setting due to new difficulties in her ability to attend, and process visual and verbal information. She lost all peer interactions and support from her classmates and peers on the sports fields. These struggles also led to a drastic drop in her attendance, compounding the difficulties she was already having from her brain injury.

The continued requirement for her to keep up with all the work as usual did not allow her brain to heal from this injury which prolonged her recovery. This created physical limitations in the form of severe migraines, and ultimately led her to struggle with anxiety and depression, even suicidal thoughts.

By the time the school did accommodate her, it was at a time and in such a way that she was already so far behind she could not see a way to catch up AND maintain her current school work. In addition, the accommodations were not required, so not every teacher implemented or followed them.

I firmly believe that if accommodations had been in place, and required immediately after her injury that her brain could have healed, her grades would not have suffered, and she would have been in a much better academic and emotional place. She might have been able to continue with her college prep courses and been away at college, preparing for her career now.

No student ever wants to suffer a brain injury, but many do. Often these injuries are not visible, but the impact can be witnessed in a student's everyday struggle to complete their daily activities. During their recovery, these students can struggle with their classwork, memory, sensory input (lights, sounds), their social interactions, their mental and behavioral health, and with physical pain. The last thing a school should do is make it harder for the student to recover and maintain their academic and social standing.

HB 3007 requires a school to act in the best interest of the student, and give them the immediate temporary accommodations they need during their brain injury recovery. If they need help with classwork, or homework, or with peer relations, the school should be providing that help just like they would if a student broke their arm and needed temporary accommodations to stay academically on track. HB 3007 will help ensure that students recovering from brain injuries get the immediate, temporary accommodations they need to maintain academic growth and heal at the same time.

Please support HB 3007. Thank you.

Signed,

Brandina Lancaster

Parent of Gwendolyn Lancaster, Graduate of South Albany High School class of 2023