



March 24, 2025

Chair Neron and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amber Eaton, and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Education Service Districts. OAESD supports HB 3562 as amended with the School Safety & Prevention System program.

The Oregon Association of Education Service Districts (OAESD), acting as the Oregon ESD P-20 Support Network, deeply appreciates the ODE continued collaboration and support for the School Safety and Prevention Services (SSPS) program. Since its expansion to 19 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, this program has proven to be a critical asset in ensuring the safety, well-being, and success of students across Oregon's school districts. However, as the federal GEER funds expire and the program transitions to state funding alone, we are facing a drastic reduction in resources that will severely limit our ability to provide the same level of vital services.

For the 2025–2027 biennium, the SSPS program will operate on a state allocation of \$3.2 million, supporting approximately 10 FTE positions, nearly a 50% reduction from current staffing levels. This funding decrease poses a significant risk to the continuity and effectiveness of school safety and prevention efforts. ESD superintendents across the state strongly believe that such a reduction makes it impossible to deliver the quality programming that Oregon's students deserve. Given this reality, we recognize that identifying an adequate solution is challenging at this time, as current options for reduction in service do not sufficiently meet the needs of our schools and communities. Instead, we are calling on ODE, the Governor's Office, and state legislators to take immediate action to restore full funding to the School Safety and Prevention System program.

Impact Stories of the SSPS Program: Success

The value and effectiveness of the SSPS program is evident in the countless success stories shared by coordinators statewide. These stories illustrate how the program has saved lives, prevented crises, and improved school climates.

Behavioral Safety Assessment Team (BSAT): In one case, a student was making detailed homicidal threats. They were referred to the BSA Team, which led to critical



trauma-informed interventions and support for the student while keeping the student engaged in school and academics. The student has graduated and is now thriving. Another district successfully implemented BSAs protocols in partnership with local agencies, law enforcement, and mental health professionals, to support a middle school student who had written about thoughts of harming other people. Through this collaborative, community approach, the team created a safety plan, connected the student with mental health resources, and worked with the family to provide on-going support, preventing potential school violence.

Suicide Prevention: A second-grade student who had attempted suicide multiple times received intervention after a School Safety and Prevention Specialist connected the school with County Behavioral Health Services. Additionally, districts across Oregon have implemented comprehensive suicide prevention trainings, leading to increased awareness and immediate life-saving interventions. In 2023, when SSPSs took on full support for districts' Adi's Act plans, only 52 districts had completed plans. Within a year, SSPSs' guidance led to a 188% increase in completed plans, with 191 out of 197 districts—97%—now having suicide prevention plans in place, strengthening statewide efforts to protect students.

School Climate & Culture: A BIPOC student facing racial bullying received direct support through SSPS, law enforcement, and local nonprofits, ensuring justice and support for the victim. In another region, a female middle schooler and her family were connected with counseling and resources after complaints that she was harassing and demonstrating problematic sexual behaviors at school.

These examples ***represent just a fraction of the program's impact.*** However, if funding is cut, our ability to respond to these situations will be significantly diminished, putting more students at risk.

What's at Stake if Funding is Reduced?

Without restoration of full funding, we will see:

- Fewer trained specialists, resulting in delays or gaps in behavioral safety assessments, suicide prevention efforts, and prevention efforts in bullying, harassment, intimidation, cyberbullying and sexual violence.
- Increased risks to student safety, including the potential for higher youth suicide rates, more unaddressed behavioral threats, and weakened bullying prevention programs.
- Loss of key partnerships, as schools rely heavily on SSPSs to connect them with law enforcement, mental health agencies, and other community resources.



Accountability and the Role of SSPS in School Safety and Student Well-being

A robust accountability system must go beyond measuring outcomes—it must ensure that schools receive sustained, meaningful support. The School Safety and Prevention Services (SSPS) program is a critical component of this infrastructure, providing direct interventions, training, and coordination to improve school safety and climate statewide. The recent OAESD testimony on accountability underscores the importance of long-term investments in regional education systems, ensuring that districts—particularly those with fewer resources—have the necessary capacity to address student safety, behavioral health, and crisis prevention effectively.

By maintaining full funding for SSPS, Oregon can align accountability measures with real, on-the-ground support, ensuring that districts are not just evaluated but actively equipped with the resources to improve student safety outcomes. This investment strengthens Oregon's regional education infrastructure and ensures that school safety remains a top priority within the broader accountability framework.

Future Needs & Recommendations

To maintain and strengthen the SSPS program, we recommend:

1. **Restoring full funding of \$6.4 million** to ensure every region has sufficient support.
2. **Securing long-term, sustainable state funding** to eliminate the uncertainty of losing full funding each biennium.
3. **Continuing to align SSPS training & resources statewide**, ensuring all specialists receive consistent, evidence-based training in critical areas like BSA, SPIP, and SIRC.
4. **Ensuring funding stability aligns with school hiring cycles** to prevent staff turnover and allow for effective program planning.
5. **Recognizing the need for regional flexibility**, ensuring specialists in rural and frontier areas receive adequate training opportunities and support.
6. **Providing stronger structural support** to reduce turnover and ensure that these positions remain stable, as continuity in these roles is essential for maintaining relationships with schools and community partners.

The Vital Role of SSPS Specialists

The work of SSPS specialists is not just critical—it is transformational for Oregon's schools. Specialists are on the front lines of suicide prevention, behavior safety [threat]



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assessment, and school climate improvement, providing direct support to students, staff, and families. Their work is relationship-based, requiring significant time and effort to build trust with schools and community based partners. High turnover due to unstable funding undermines this work and forces schools to start over with new specialists, losing valuable momentum.

One SSPS shared, “I absolutely love my job. We are very busy supporting schools, and it’s wonderful. But this work is vast—suicide prevention, bullying prevention, and threat assessment could each be standalone positions. Keeping up with all four fields while still doing the work is a challenge.” Another specialist noted the importance of funding stability, stating, “Every time an SSPS moves on due to uncertain funding, new relationships have to be built. Stability is necessary for this program to be most effective.”

Call to Action

We urge ODE, the Governor’s Office, and state legislators to ***prioritize the safety and well-being of Oregon’s students*** by **restoring full funding to the School Safety and Prevention Services program** (\$6.4 million). The SSPS program has proven effective in preventing school violence and youth suicide while fostering a positive school climate where all students feel safe, supported, and a sense of belonging. This program is too vital to reduce—Oregon’s students deserve consistent and robust support for their safety and well-being.

We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate on securing the future of school safety in Oregon and look forward to working together on a sustainable solution that ensures every student has access to the support they need. Thank you for your time and partnership.

Sincerely,

Amber Eaton
OAESD Executive Director