

## Statement of Brandina Lancaster in support of House Bill 3007

Dear Members of the Senate 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 this time immediate temporary accommodations are not required, only suggested. It is left to the discretion of the school administration, most of whom have little to no understanding of short term or long term implications of a concussion on a student's 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. Had my daughter been given accommodations immediately after her injury, she would most likely be away at college today, but she was not.

Before her concussion my daughter was average to advanced 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.

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 deficits 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.

The continued requirement for her to keep up with all the work as usual did not allow her brain to have down time to heal from these injuries 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 finally accommodate her, it was in such a way that she was already so far behind she could not see a way to catch up AND maintain her current workload. 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 preparing for her career now.

No student ever wants to suffer a brain injury, but many do. 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 accommodations they need during their brain injury recovery. If, because of their brain injury, they need help with classwork, or homework, or with their friends, the school should be providing that help. If they need physical accommodation in their classrooms because of the lights, or the noises, or proximity to peers, they should receive those accommodations, as well. HB 3007 will help ensure that students recovering from brain injuries get the 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

Before her concussion my daughter was average to advanced 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.

Gwen suffered a significant concussion in the spring of her sophomore year (2021). It was identified by her athletic trainer immediately, and requests for support and accommodations were made. She was not given any accommodations by her school because it was not required.

There were a few teachers she felt she could request accommodations from on her own and in those classes she was able to complete most coursework and she felt safe and somewhat capable. In other classes teachers let the whole class know that “one” student needed accommodations, so everyone could use them, but the accommodations were not followed. This also singled her out with her peers, who were already having difficulty understanding because she had changed significantly (academically and emotionally), but there was no visible injury.

The changes no one could see after her concussion were academically impactful. Her reading speed and comprehension decrease significantly. Her writing was disorganized with poor penmanship. She had a drastic drop in attendance because she did not feel safe or supported in her classes. When she was at school she struggled to navigate the campus and hallways because there were too many people and too much noise. In her classes she had decreased attention, decreased memory for things she had learned and was learning, decreased processing speed (it took her longer to understand what she saw and heard), and word finding problems. There was too much noise and light in the classrooms. Viewing information and working on a computer screen exhausted her and gave her migraines. These issues led to incomplete or missing work in all classes, poor test scores and ultimately near failing grades in all courses within weeks of her concussion.

Due to slower processing time, and her ability to regulate lights and sounds in class, she began to have outbursts in class. This in turn led to peers making fun of her and social isolation. My child lost all peer and teammate support. Eventually, this led to self isolation, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

What I watched her go through during this time was devastating as a parent. I watched as my child went from an active and involved, life loving young woman who was confident in her future to her being to a shell of a human being with no direction or motivation. She could not navigate her world, her friends, her life, her academics, she lost hope and desire in all the things that had mattered to her. She went from an effortless learner to studying for days on end only to fail, no matter how hard she tried. She retreated and stopped enjoying any part of life. She would not leave the house unless required to (and then often snuck back home). She developed a fear and distrust of the people in her life who were supposed to be there to teach, support, and protect her.

What I do know is due to her rapid drop in grades because she couldn't make up work AND keep up with classwork and homework she was teased and ostracized by peers. She lost all peer interactions and support from her classroom and the sports fields.

The continued requirement for her to keep up with all the work as usual did not allow her brain to have down time to heal from these injuries which prolonged her recovery.

By the time the school did finally accommodate her, it was in such a way that she was already so far behind she could not see a way out and 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 preparing for her career.

I see her healing right now. Our family has allowed her to tell us she was not ready for more school and as she has been allowed more “down time” her brain has finally started to recover from these injuries. Sadly it took her losing almost everything to learn to have a strong voice for what her mind and body need to be healthy.