TESTIMONY

OREGON SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

BEFORE THE: **40-40-20 Workgroup**

BY: **Kevin McCann, Executive Director; Beth Gerot, Past President; & Karen Cunningham, Board Member**

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During the short time since Senate Bill 909 was signed into law, we have sought input on ideas forwarded to you by the LearnWorks project and on your charge. Our organization has completed 15 of 17 fall regional meetings around the state at which we have informed local school board members about the key components in the new law. In the past six weeks, we've been in The Dalles, Condon, Salem, Albany, Seaside, Hillsboro, Pendleton, Enterprise, Eugene, Vale, Redmond, Paisley, Burns, Bandon and Medford. Tonight we will be in Roseburg and next week will finish our tour in Portland.

In general, local school board members have a basic awareness of SB 909 so the purpose of our regional meetings is to inform them about the implications of this legislation. The feedback we collected is anecdotal, not systematic and, while the OSBA Board of Directors heard a presentation by Tim Nesbitt about SB 909 and by Beth Gerot about LearnWorks, it has not had a discussion or taken a position. We have been tracking development of the OEIB and are pleased to have a role in helping to shape how this is implemented. I would not be truthful if I did not also tell you that some of our members have concerns about some elements of this transformation agenda. I passed along this information in a phone conversation with Tim Nesbitt last week and am happy to discuss it with others at the appropriate time.

At its best, a local school board sets the vision and goals for the district, hires an effective CEO, allocates resources, and monitors the data tracking student success. For the most part, school board members are not professional educators, so the board and superintendent must work as a team to ensure that every student graduates with the skills necessary to be successful in post-secondary life.

Oregon's community colleges are governed in much the same way. In acknowledgment of efforts to create a seamless education system, in the past month the OSBA and OCCA boards of directors passed the following joint resolution committing to a partnership to help shape the implementation of SB909:

"We resolve to participate in a meaningful way in a conversation about creating a learner-centered, outcomes based education system in Oregon and to share our conversation with the Oregon Education Investment Board, legislators and others."

Outcomes and Indicators

OSBA generally supports the outcomes and indicators defined by the work done on early childhood education. We know that the success of K-12 education will be greatly enhanced by improvements in early childhood programs in Oregon when they are focused on preparing every child to arrive at the schoolhouse door ready to succeed. To the extent that we improve the early childhood outcomes, outcomes at the elementary school level will improve. Therefore, we support the general developmental milestones being considered by the Early Learning Council.

We support the development of a longitudinal data system integrated across all institutions (0-20) that is learner based and that is useful. This must inform educators within and across learner groups. It must also inform students and their families and policy makers and researchers.

We also generally support the outcomes and indicators identified by the LearnWorks project and the seamless system that ensures that every learner is proficient in the skills necessary before moving to the next learner group. In addition to content knowledge, learners must have the thinking skills and habits of mind necessary for success. This must mean multiple pathways and multiple measures of proficiency with clearly identified milestones along the way. We want all students in Oregon to be prepared to be college and career ready for whatever path they choose in life.

Equity

A crucial component of the 40-40-20 goal is equity. We know that, as groups, students of color, English Language Learners and students in poverty, among others, are not achieving at the same rates as middle and upper-middle class white students in our state. The Oregon Education Investment Board and everyone in the education community simply must correct this injustice. Our commitment to student success must fully apply to every student regardless of their circumstances or the difficulty of meeting their needs.

Anyone who has been in our schools for more than a cursory visit knows that education is an extremely challenging profession today. The most successful schools and districts build a fundamental belief among teachers, administrators and school board members that every student can be successful. Yet this attitude is not universally held. As we work to make dramatic improvement in student achievement, it will be vitally important that we set targets for universal acceptance of this belief.

Mutual Accountability

With this in mind, we would like to advocate that clear, statewide outcomes with indicators of success must align very tightly with the Common Core Standards that Oregon is adopting. If we don't choose the correct outcomes for measurement at the state level, teachers, schools and districts will pursue the wrong targets. To a certain extent, this was a fundamental flaw of No Child Left Behind, which certainly caused educators to examine data about challenged learner groups, but also created a massive shift toward "teaching to the test" with the effect of narrowing the curriculum rather than what we know will make learners successful in the 21st Century.

School board members in Oregon believe that the state and local districts have mutual accountability for the success of students. A carefully-crafted achievement compact is necessary for this to occur. The state must define clear outcomes and indicators and provide statewide structures that support a seamless system. This includes a stable source of funding, a useful longitudinal data system, and support for professional development and curriculum and assessment. In return, local districts and boards must be given flexibility in implementation and innovation to meet or exceed the outcomes and have barriers in terms of regulations and mandates removed. There must also be strategies in place for those districts or schools that are not meeting defined outcomes.

The major focus of this outcomes and indicators discussion is on student performance, as it should be. However, from a systems perspective, we should also develop measures for how the zero-to-twenty system itself is improving. Is student interaction between levels in the system - preschool, K-12, post-secondary - becoming less burdensome? Are partnerships along the continuum growing and improving? It's not clear what would give us the greatest leverage, but this is critically important to student success at all levels.

Another important outcome in the system is to expand our capacity for support and improvement resources. For example, school improvement capacity at the Oregon Department of Education has been decimated in recent years. As a state, we simply must rebuild our capacity for positively and productively assisting educators and districts as they undertake change and improvement initiatives.

Local School Boards

The 1,400 locally elected volunteer school board members play a key role in bringing transformational change to schools. OSBA provides professional development in areas such as board leadership, the use of achievement data and building community support needed to understand this role and we look forward to continued collaboration with you in this important work.