June 18, 2018

Dear Chair Veliz and Members of the State Board,

I write today representing the more than 45,000 members of the Oregon Education Association to support the Grade Level Learning Goals, revisions to the Oregon School Library Standards, and the critical role that licensed teacher librarians play in ensuring the standards are used to support student success.

Library instruction is a vital component of a well-rounded education but one that, unfortunately, has become a victim of decades of disinvestment in education in this state. As the information presented to the State Board of Education on this issue notes, Oregon once could boast of a robust librarian workforce of more than 800 licensed librarians. Sadly, today that number has dwindled precipitously and there are not enough working teacher librarians to cover all of Oregon’s school districts.

With the passage of the Student Success Act this year, Oregon has the opportunity to reinvest in a well-rounded education experience for students, one that includes a licensed teacher librarian. Research is clear that quality library programs and instruction benefit all students and specifically for historically underserved students. Library programs contribute greatly to informational literacy, reading engagement, and social responsibility. OEA believes library instruction should be delivered by a licensed teacher librarian.

The era of No Child Left Behind and the over-sized emphasis on reading and math test scores caused many schools to turn away from well-rounded education programming and to turn toward a narrow curriculum, prescriptive intervention programs, and reductions in the very things that make school a place where students want to come to. Those moves were based on the false premise that the best measure of a school was reading and math test scores and that high-stakes tests were the ultimate expression of student learning and growth.

Students thrive in robust, challenging, and engaging well-rounded schools that include project-based learning, creative thinking, and collaborative problem-solving – all skills supported by a high-quality library program taught by a licensed teacher librarian. We owe it to this next generation of students to undo the disinvestments in their education and to restore programs that make school worth attending and that prepare students for life after high school. Library programs do just that.

Sincerely,

John Larson
OEA President