

April 8, 2015

Oregon State Board of Education:

My name is Diane Kunkel and I have been a Sauvie Island resident for almost thirty years. My husband and I farm over 1,800 acres on the island and we raised our family in the small island neighborhood. Our daughters both attended Sauvie Island School in the 90's; they thrived in the small classrooms and community-driven activities. I have also spent the last 12 years on our local school board; the first 8 at Scappoose School district and the last 4 at Sauvie Island Academy.

A little background on Sauvie Island: It is located where the Willamette River meets the Columbia River; about 10 miles from Portland. The island is approximately 24,000 acres—about 15 miles long and about four miles wide, almost the same size and shape as Manhattan. The northern 12,000 acres are owned by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and managed as the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area and the southern half is predominantly rural farmland with small residential enclaves. Access to the island is by the Sauvie Island Bridge on Highway 30; there is only one way on and one way off the Island.

I support the waiver that allows students to attend Sauvie Island Academy based on sibling and residential criteria. Sauvie Island Academy is the only school on Sauvie Island. The school's current waiver protects young learners from excessive periods of time spent on a bus. Because the island is rather large in size, it's possible that a student currently needs to travel 7-10 miles to get attend the island school. If the waiver is discontinued, the island residents will have a more difficult time attending the island school and students are at risk for 2.5 hour bus rides to attend off-island schools.

Sauvie Island is zoned for agriculture and many of the island residents work on local farms, including ours. Several of the farm employees do not speak English or English is their second language. And this is true in their homes and with their children. It is critical that our community continues to offer appropriate resources for these families and students. The current waiver supports these families and students by offering a neighborhood school that is a diverse and safe community for multiple cultures.

Despite the island's large size, it is home to very few residents due to the farm land zoning regulations. These zoning laws limit the amount of development on Sauvie Island. Over the past 50 years, the island school has enrolled around 50 island residents. The other students have attended from other communities. Since Sauvie Island is still zoned for agriculture and will continue to be so in the future, the school will still depend on off-island students to keep its doors open.

It is important to me and the island community that the waiver is continued for years to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Diane Kunkel
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