To: Members of the Oregon Board of Education,

My public comment for the April 10-11 Board meeting:

I submitted a written public comment to the March 6-7 meeting of the Board of Education. I asked the Board to adopt the following rule as Oregon Administrative Rule 581-023-0250: High School Study Abroad:

**"For the purpose of calculating Average Daily Membership (ADM) used in the distribution of State School Funds, a school district may count high school students studying abroad on programs approved and paid for by the school district."**

To date (3/26/14) I have received no reply to that public comment.

As the Superintendent and Board of Portland Public Schools develop their 2014-15 budget, I cannot tell them whether they would be able count the six high school students they might fund for high school years abroad in their ADM calculation for the distribution of State School Funds. Your Board action or non-action could determine whether those six student get to study abroad.

In my public comment for the March 6-7 meeting, I stressed (1) that Oregon’s best economic future is to sell more goods and services abroad by developing a more multilingual workforce with experiences in the important growing markets abroad through high school study abroad programs. And (2) that for individual students, studying abroad can be transformative with significant educational benefits.

Others agree with me. NY Times columnist Nicholas Kristof recently wrote a column ""Go West, Young People! And East!" in support of study abroad. He wrote of collegiate study abroad but the same thoughts apply to high school study abroad. He wrote, in part:

Utah may well be the most cosmopolitan state in America. Vast numbers of young Mormons — increasingly women as well as men — spend a couple of years abroad as missionaries and return jabbering in Thai or Portuguese and bearing a wealth of international experience.

More than 130 languages are spoken daily in commerce in Utah, according to the University of Utah, and **that’s one reason it sometimes tops the Forbes list of best states to do business. The state is a center for trade and for global companies.** [emphasis added]

American universities should also be sending people abroad, but they are still quite insular. The number of Americans studying abroad has tripled over the past 20 years, but, still, fewer than 10 percent of college students study overseas during undergraduate years. Three times as many foreigners study in America as the other way around.

Kristof's column provoked four published letters to the editor.

From Mike Brost:

Fewer than one in 10 American college students graduate with study-abroad experience, and most of those students study in familiar countries with which the United States already has strong cultural, political and economic ties, and they spend eight weeks or less abroad.

The simple truth is that study abroad is no longer just an excuse for college students to backpack across Europe or relax on foreign beaches**; it’s an economic and strategic imperative. Globally fluent citizens and workers — those adept at navigating at least some countries and markets outside their own — are a necessary component of a competitive American economy.**

**America is at a critical juncture. How its students react to our rapidly changing world will help determine not just how they fare in the global job market but also how America fares on an increasingly competitive global stage.** [emphasis added]

From Allan E. Goodman, President and Chief Executive, Institute of International Education (in part):

Nicholas Kristof is correct in saying that study abroad should be part of every college student’s education. Whether the program is academic or experiential, it’s important for all college students to graduate having had an international experience that enhances cross-cultural communication skills and foreign language capabilities necessary to succeed in the global economy.

**But to do so, we need to shift the paradigm so that study abroad is seen by all stakeholders — including parents, educators and employers — as essential so that students go to college wondering not if they will go abroad but when.** [emphasis added]

From Michael J. Kimball (in part):

While I agree that young people should travel abroad, not everyone can.

Nicholas Kristof claims that “there’s a misconception that gap years or study-abroad opportunities are feasible only for the affluent,” but what Mr. Kristof calls “free” options require participants to pay program fees and travel expenses and, of course, make a significant time commitment.

What he doesn’t acknowledge is that **there is an access gap for young people who come from low socioeconomic status families or underrepresented populations** or who are first-generation college students.

In a 2012 study, Georgia State University sociologists reported that students’ awareness and perception of study abroad, social networks and cultural capital are critical factors shaping their international experiences.

And from Aaron M. Schwartz::

Taking a gap year in Urubamba, Peru, was the best decision of my life. I was one of 28 volunteers on Princeton University's Bridge Year Program, which allows incoming freshmen to defer their admission to take an international gap year. Program participants spend nine months living with a local family, taking language classes and working with local nonprofits.

Even though Princeton covers almost all costs associated with the program, a relatively small number of freshmen apply. Why? It seems as if American students struggle with the idea of separating from the educational fast track that parents and educators expect.

Back on campus, however, returned volunteers not only successfully readjust to an academic setting, incorporating their new experiences into their academic pursuits, but are also overwhelmingly active in civil service organizations and social action groups.

So my advice? Do something different. Go on an adventure. Learn a new language. You won’t regret it.

A high school year abroad should and could be an option for every Oregon high school student. It is especially important to begin to give more high school study abroad opportunities to low income students and students of color. The Board has the authority to adopt this proposed rule. I urge you, the Oregon Board of Education, to take this small steps to make it so.

Thank You.

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The full Kristof column is at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/opinion/sunday/go-west-young-people-and-east.html

The four letters to the editor are at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/20/opinion/studying-abroad-in-a-linked-world.html?ref=opinion&\_r=1