

To the Esteemed Members of the Joint Interim Committee on Student Success, et al.:

I want to register serious concern for a proposal to increase spending in districts to grow the education workforce in general, and to diversify the same more specifically.

It came to my attention from [this blog post](#) that COSA wants the State of Oregon to spend \$15.8 million on a Grow Your Own Educator Recruitment and Development Fund, in part to address the lack of diversity in the Oregon Teacher Workforce.

I must say I hear alarm bells go off when someone says that we already know how to recruit, train, and retain high quality educators of color in virtually any district in the state. Oregon has a deep history of racism and white supremacy that only recently has been surfaced in the popular culture as a matter to be understood, to say nothing of interrogating and transforming the systems that operate on this same deeply rooted principle. So, when Dr. Karen Gray comes before you to say, “We know how to do this,” without presenting any supporting evidence for the claim, I feel compelled to respond.

I understand that I am stepping into this process as a layperson. I am not a legislator or a member of COSA; I am a classroom teacher. I have no animus toward Dr. Gray. Indeed, I understand that she did incredible work at Parkrose. I come to this place of concern based on my experience as a teacher of color, my time in the Portland Teachers Program (a program that *does* know how to prepare people of color to teach), and what I have heard from my colleagues of color across the state about their experience in Oregon’s school districts.

Several things must be understood about the underrepresentation of people of color in education.

First, it is a supply issue: students of color are more likely to experience poverty, and are excluded from schools at higher rates, reducing the proportion of students of color who graduate high school ready to attend college. The number of students of color who successfully matriculate are then faced with the choice of a career path that will allow them to recover from the massive debt load they will incur by attending college. When looking at the possibility of a career in teaching, the most highly qualified students of color will pass, because the lifetime earnings of an educator are the lowest of any career requiring an advanced degree. We tell kids of color to be successful, and then we’re surprised when they don’t choose education on the other end. So, the pipeline—and it is a pipeline—is a trickle, while the *other* pipeline remains on full pressure, like a fire hose.

Second, once you have highly qualified teacher candidates of color, they need to have had training on how to navigate and manage the extremely white (and by virtue of that fact, white supremacist) culture that is American public education. This accounts for a high rate of attrition among teachers of color, and any program that says they are serious about attracting and retaining more teachers of color better address this explicitly, and in great detail.

Third, and most importantly, you have to transform the culture of white supremacy in schools. The culture of the schools must change to accommodate people of color, so that they feel welcome, wanted, and worthy of being in the space. These buildings hold generations of trauma for communities of color, and until we stem the tide of black and brown people getting funneled into low wage work and incarceration through the public school system, schools won’t be safe spaces for people of color to practice developing the capacities of all students to reach their highest potential.

So, if I might be so bold, I would say that any proposal to spend \$15 million of hard earned taxpayer money by giving it to the same people who are producing our current outcomes, needs to address these three points in exacting detail.

I would be more than happy to respond in further detail, should any of you find it useful.

Thank you for your time in this matter.

Respectfully,

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"The more people participate in the process of their own education... the more the people participate in the development of their selves. The more the people become themselves, the better the democracy. The less people are asked about what they want, about their expectations, the less democracy we have."--Paulo Freire, "We Make the Road by Walking"