

Written Testimony for SB 204: Karen Gray

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of SB 204: Culturally Responsive Teaching Practice. My name is Dr. Karen Fischer Gray and I have been the Superintendent of the Parkrose School District for the last 11 years. I have been an educator/administrator since 1980. Parkrose School District is in Portland Oregon and it is the 7th most diverse school district in the state and it the most diverse school district in Multnomah County having the highest percentage of African American students statewide. Parkrose is an Equity and Social Justice champion in the state.

For the last three years, Parkrose School District has hosted the statewide conference known as Teaching With Purpose (TWP) at Parkrose Middle School. Last year, TWP boasted more 600 participants. The keynote speakers, entertainers and session presenters rivaled any I have ever experienced in my career with a hugely diverse audience. The conferences have been smashing successes each year and the topic of racial and linguistic diversity and equity has been widely debated, discussed and celebrated at these events.

The organizer and beating heart behind these events is Karanja Crews, a former public school teacher and scholar. His desire is to make sure that every educator in Oregon is exposed to first and then further trained in the practices of Culturally Responsive Teaching Practice and Pedagogy in order to meet the educational and social emotional needs of all Oregon students. The TWP conference and its content provides a model for the state of Oregon to provide teacher preparation programs and schools a way to train teachers and administrators in this pedagogy. While TWP is not the only organization in Oregon trained to provide this teaching, it is certainly one of the best and the model demonstrated annually at the conference is a model for others to use and replicate.

In addition, Mr. Crews and TWP are in partnership with Eastern Oregon University in providing a new program for high school aged children dreaming to become teachers in Oregon. TWP provides the curriculum and pedagogy while EOU provides the structure and program for teacher preparation beginning with high school students in the Education Pathways Program. Students attend classes at EOU and also their local high schools year round receiving both high school credit and college credit. This partnership goes a long way to support College and Career Readiness. This work also fits within the guidelines of the newly passed Measure 98 Career Technical Education bill. TWP's involvement with outstanding new educational artists that integrate traditional education preparation with the hip-hop realm appeals widely to students of color and others in a big way. It is creative and exciting. It helps to move the dial of the Oregon Education Equity Advisory Committee's charge of diversification of Oregon's educational workforce.

In closing, I would urge you to pass SB 204. The TWPs ability to bring an outstanding educational conference to Portland and all of Oregon is growing. The Culturally Responsive Teaching training that happens there is helping the education field change to meet the social emotional and educational needs of our children. The work in partnership with Eastern Oregon University is innovative and exciting. Please support this bill.

