

George Russell
February 15, 2017

Written Testimony for Senate Bill 204-1

Chair Roblan, Vice Chair Linthicum, & members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill 204. For the record, my name is George Russell. I am a member of the Governor's Council on Educator Advancement as well as sit as a director on the State Board of Education, however, this testimony is submitted not on their behalf. This testimony reflects my own personal concerns on Senate Bill 204-1. My background includes an undergraduate degree in Social Psychology from Howard University in Washington D.C. and a Master's in Public Administration from Golden Gate University, Administrator Licensure from the University of Oregon, and completion of the Superintendent Leadership Program at Harvard University. I was the superintendent of the Eugene Public Schools 4J in Eugene and have worked with school districts in San Diego, Seattle and Oklahoma City. I have been a part of several boards and commissions here in the State of Oregon. My passion is educational equity.

The core of this bill is about students and increasing outcomes for our most vulnerable student populations. We all agree that having teachers who are trained in cultural competency is important. We want students to have teachers who are supportive and understand the different cultural backgrounds with which students enter into our schools with. While the spirit of the bill is on the right path, the process seems vague.

Specifically, Senate Bill 204-1 directs the Oregon Department of Education to work with one single organization to certify school districts and teachers on cultural competency.

This is problematic. Over the years, we have had several organizations that have been brought together by legislation (HB 34999, HB 2016, & SB 182 for example) to work towards a holistic approach to provide culturally responsive pedagogy to Oregon teachers. These bills have provided the foundation to move the dial with our teacher training on cultural competency. Having the Oregon Department of Education work with one single vendor, undermines that process. It also dictates that one single organization come up with the certification details, process, standards and dictates what those are to the Oregon Department of Education. Senate Bill 204-1 seems to preclude the Oregon Department of Education from working with various vendors or organizations for the certification process. It is important to allow some flexibility here because school districts will have different needs and will most likely need to have the ability to work with organizations that know their student populations.

In closing, I would like to thank you for reading my written testimony and urge the Senate Committee on Education to look at this matter closely.

Respectfully,

George Russell

Retired District Superintendent