

Senate Committee on Education
Letter in Support of HB 2023-A: Inclusive Instructional Materials
May 20, 2019

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Rhys Springall, and I am an MSW student pursuing my School Social Work Licensure. I am also a transgender man. Over the past school term, I have been studying school-wide interventions around inclusive instructional materials from a social work perspective, and I have seen evidence of the importance of historical representation and inclusion in classrooms. One program in particular, Facing History and Ourselves, has been growing and revising itself for a few decades now, and emphasizes curriculum and instructional materials around racial histories within the US¹.

Students in this program may read about the legacies of the Reconstruction Era in conjunction with *To Kill A Mockingbird*; they may learn about the Holocaust alongside memoirs of US Japanese internment and anti-eugenics activism. Though this program focuses primarily on race, which is only one subset of HB 2023-A's "certain classifications of people," the long-term results of the program's emphasis on celebrating difference and the histories of the civic actions of marginalized communities are remarkable: students in this program were almost twice as likely to report that their classes motivated them to learn²; 69 percent more likely to feel a strong civic responsibility in state and local issues³; 44 percent less likely to report getting into fights⁴; significantly more able to constructively address social conflicts⁵; and held less racist beliefs⁶. This program's active inclusion of people of color has consistently demonstrated positive impacts on students' academic scores, behavioral problems, and social emotional wellbeing. The implementation of HB 2023-A would be a movement towards a more holistic education, an education that actively includes and celebrates the diversity of our students, and could lead to similar all-around impacts.

To tell a personal story, when I was in 7th grade, a trans man's pregnancy was making headlines. I remember a student broached the subject in my science class, and my teacher gave us a vague explanation that did not include any information about trans identities. Years later, in college, as the gay marriage debate was (re)occurring, I finally learned about the mainstream LGB movement—about its victories, about its losses, about Harvey Milk. It was not until late in my undergraduate years in an elective class that I finally got to hear the word "transgender"—what it means, what famous trans people are doing and have done. It was then that my own identity as a

¹ Facing History and Ourselves. "Facing History and Ourselves." Accessed May 2, 2019.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/>

² Taylor, Rebecca D., Oberle, Eva, Durlak, Joseph A., Weissberg, Roger P. "Promoting Positive Youth Development through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects." *Child Development*, 88 no. 4 (2017): 1156-1171

³ Ibid.

⁴ Facing History and Ourselves. "How We Know It Works." (2019): Accessed May 11, 2019.

https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/How_we_Know_it_Words_32619.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. "2015 CASEL Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs." (2015) Accessed May 10, 2019. <https://casel.org/middle-and-high-school-edition-casel-guide/>

trans person finally clicked. Though it is impossible to say, I speculate that I might have come to understand myself sooner if I had been exposed to histories of trans people as a K-12 student. Though LGBT visibility and awareness has risen drastically improved since my public school years, the misinformation and historical exclusions have not. This is why I support HB 2023-A: it ensures that students will get an honest, accurate depiction of our marginalized heroes and histories.

HB 2023-A builds upon 2017's Ethnic Studies legislation and gives Oregon's students a chance to see themselves in their educations. Inclusive education materials give students a chance to understand their own importance within the US, as well as the evidence to know how their communities have helped shape our world. This Bill will help empower our students to take agency in their own educations and remind our students that their voices matter. Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Committee, I urge you to support our students with the passage of HB 2023-A.

Thank you all so much for your time,

Rhys Springall