



LatinoNetwork

**Testimony of Anthony Castaneda, Policy Manager
Regarding Schools Reopening and Education Equity
Senate Committee on Education
January 27th, 2021**

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the committee,

As a local nonprofit working closely with children and families, we thank you for the opportunity to share the experiences of our community to advance equity in our public education system.

Latino Network is a culturally specific nonprofit serving Latino children, youth, and families in Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties. In any given year, our organization provides transformative services to over 8,000 Latino youth, families and community members in the areas of education and mentorship, leadership development, and family stability.

The global pandemic revealed and exacerbated existing social, economic, and technological disparities disproportionately affecting historically marginalized communities in our education system. While some households adjusted to a work-from-home schedule, other families working in the hardest hit areas of the economy struggled to keep up with bills. When school districts shifted to virtual learning, many households did not have reliable internet access or electronic devices. Our youth were asked to care for younger siblings and sacrifice learning to earn income for their families. The silver lining is that Oregon recently rallied for historic investments in education equity and justice. The historic passage of the Student Success Act gives the public education system a chance to address these disparities when schools are fully prepared to reopen.

We join the Oregon Coalition for Education Justice, a group of over 20 community-based organizations and advocates, in support of the [2021 Legislative Agenda](#) that paves the way for racial justice through education by keeping our promise in the Student Success Act.

The Student Success Act investments will leverage the decades of experience and expertise of educators and community-based organizations to ensure that education resumes responsively to the needs of all Oregon children—especially Black children, Indigenous children, children of color, low-income children, children living with disability, children in rural communities.



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Community-based organizations bring valuable human, social, and financial resources to our education system. Non-profits, like Latino Network, play an integral role in the personal and academic lives of our youngest children and families. Latino Network programs are designed to ensure the Latinx community has access to programming that is responsive to our cultural and linguistic assets and skills. Latino Network's culturally specific programs, such as *Juntos Aprendemos* (Together We Learn), are proven to support *parents as a child's first teacher* and prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond. These programs are made possible when education is fully funded.

Early Learning Account

- Expand Access to Culturally Relevant, Inclusive, Developmentally Appropriate Preschool and Early Learning programs, such as the Preschool Promise, Head Start and Oregon Pre-Kindergarten, and Equity Fund. This investment will add over 6,000 preschool & Early Head Start slots, and increase grants to culturally specific organizations to serve 1,100 additional children without access to preschool to support kindergarten readiness.

Student Investment Account

- The Student Investment Account (SIA) within the SSA represents the state's largest equity investment in Oregon schools. SIA plans expand mental and behavioral health services, reduce classroom sizes, and reduce academic disparities affecting historically underserved students. Thousands of students, staff, educators, and families contributed to the planning and development of SIA plans.

SSA Statewide Initiatives

- Increase investment in Oregon's statewide equity plans—including the Black/African American, Latino/a/x and Indigenous, American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success Plans—to honor community self-determination and invest in community-based organizations as partners supporting students.

A business-as-usual approach to schools reopening and recovery will continue to exacerbate the disparities in our education system. Oregon cannot return to status quo. Looking to the future, we see an education system that welcomes every student and fosters the conditions for every student to thrive.