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Colt Gill

Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction

TO: Chair Dembrow & Members of the Senate Education Committee

DATE: February 19, 2021

FROM: Jessica Ventura, Government Relations Director

RE: Questions posed on February 1, February 3 & February 10, 2021

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share our testimony with you. We are more than happy to continue providing information to you on our work and look forward to our continued partnership on behalf of all Oregon students. During our testimony provided on February 1st, 3rd and 10th, many members asked questions, some of them regarding agency-requested bills as well as member-requested bills. Below you will find our response to each of them. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you need further clarification.

With gratitude,
Jessica Ventura

Senate Bill 53 - Regional Programs

Question from Sen. Dembrow: What falls into the low incidence / high needs disabilities?

ODE's Response: We serve students with disabilities that are rare, but high cost. Our regional program is nationally lauded; we have that teacher housed regionally rather than in each school. These specialists are extremely expensive; these are not specialists that we can easily hire, and it's hard to hire and keep these folks on. This regional model helps us to do that.

Question from Sen. Gelser: Why is autism still considered low incidence?

ODE's Response: We had about a year long conversation with these districts - whether we keep autism as part of this package. It does account for about 75% of students in regional programs. The main reason for continuing to serve students with autism within regional programs is we are able to provide more services despite cuts to funding. That decision was made together with educational districts.

Question from Sen. Gelser: So these are like regionalized segregated classrooms? Isn't this not good for children and their siblings? What about inclusive education?

ODE's Response: It's an important question. Lack of funding often tends to contribute to the lack of inclusivity. We need to compartmentalize our services because of this. We've been having a lot of conversations around inclusive education - it means increased professional development, increased resources.

Question from Sen. Gelser: I just wanted to clarify the amendment. I have significant concerns about serving children in separate segregated schools when they should be served in their neighborhood schools. This is not protecting those programs, is it? Are these solely the itinerant programs that come to the districts, or are we voting to restore where we ship kids across county lines to these schools? Does the program come to a neighborhood school, or are these students being served only with other students with the same disability?

ODE's Response: The original bill would have inadvertently cancelled current contracts that provide services through Regional Programs. Our intention was not to do that, but just to update language and align to federal law. (Here is a [regional map](#) of where these programs are located.) There was legitimate concern from both our partner schools and ODE that the removal of this language would cancel current contracts. Some of these contracts do include specialized programming to students. In effect, keeping this language intact means students will continue to receive specialized services from professionals who are licensed and specifically trained in their unique disability areas. If this language is stricken in the middle of these contracts, Oregon currently does not have a ready, workable model to move to that will provide stability for all students.

ODE understands Senator Gelser has concerns particularly around the issue of segregation, and it's a concern we recognize as challenging. This study can help shed more light on what the options are moving forward for providing these services. For more clarification on the study mentioned in section 4 of the bill, the word "program" is used to describe the regional model, but ODE is working to change the name of Regional Programs to Regional Inclusive Services. Talking about the program in terms of "services" will better support ODE's vision for equity and high quality inclusion. If the study is initiated, we will have additional opportunities to research

the most optimal means of providing inclusive services and ensuring that students are served in the least restrictive environment.

Senate Bill 55 - Statewide Facilities Assessment

Question from Sen. Dembrow: Could you explain more about the planning process for this? We're all thinking about HVAC systems these days - there's a decent chance that there will be more federal investment in school facilities. Shovel-ready, identified projects - where are we with data and identifying what projects are ready to go? How well poised are we?

ODE's Response: We have information on statewide facilities, but it's very basic information - name, location, square feet. It doesn't get into detail like information on HVAC systems, filtering capabilities, etc. We have that information for some schools through our Technical Assistance program that provides grants. We have information on a piecemeal basis - we're trying to get that detailed information that is then statewide. This is the goal with this proposal. This database will help us be able to identify projects and answer questions for districts about what the state of their facilities are.

Question from Sen. Dembrow: Do you ever see yourself doing an equity analysis? How would you see that working? Obviously we're not going to see enough funding to meet the needs out there, so how would you see us prioritizing?

ODE's Response: The goal of this would be to get that information out of this. We hope to get a facility condition index out of this - we can prioritize buildings just by that alone to see where the high priority needs buildings are. We can look at that number, but also take into consideration some equity considerations -- low-income communities, communities that are unlikely to pass a bond. Within two or three years, we should have more usable information. We can also prioritize getting information on older buildings first.

Question from Sen. Thomsen: It looks like we're swapping some money from one program to another. If we start this program, will there still be a need for the other opt-in program?

ODE's Response: They are two separate programs right now. We will continue to offer the technical assistance grants for school districts on its current course. The ultimate goal is that the entire state would have access to this similar data. The number of grants going to this type of technical assistance grants we would expect to decrease over time as this new program gets going. Other types of facilities grants may increase as they have access to this sort of information - for example, seismic assessments, environmental hazard assessments, etc.

Senate Bill 52 - LGBTQ2SIA+ Student Success Plan

Question from Sen. Dembrow: We don't necessarily know how students identify themselves. Has there been any conversations around how we will measure how we're doing and if we are making progress? Will it include self-identification or anonymous reporting?

ODE's Response: In the current LGBTQ2SIA+ Student Success Plan, two potential metrics are identified to assist with accountability. The plan proposes using the Statewide School Climate and Culture survey to help inform policy decisions. It also proposes looking at attendance, school discipline, on-track by 9th grade, and graduation rates by gender, including non-binary students, as a part of assessment. Note that in implementation, the plan asks the survey to be anonymous, opt-out, and allow for disaggregation and intersectional analysis by race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability at minimum. The plan also includes proposed metrics around ensuring educators and school administrators feeling supported to create safer and more welcoming school environments for LGBTQ2SIA+ students potentially via the School Climate and Culture Survey for Administrators.

Senate Bill 227 - Ethnic Studies

Question from Sen. Dembrow: I understand there is a period of time in between, lead time between the new standards, time for textbook selection, etc. It will be several years before the standards are actually required. Could districts roll it out earlier if they feel they're ready?

ODE's Response: Yes, that is true. Some districts are a little bit further ahead and might be ready to implement ethnic standards earlier. Some are not there yet, and this gives us time at ODE to develop that technical support and expertise.

Question from Sen. Dembrow: As the standards were being developed, we experienced the events of last spring, which led a lot of people to refocus on racism. I'm assuming these standards will support a better understanding of our history regarding systemic racism. Is that right?

ODE's Response: Yes - what we've witnessed within the last year, it has never been more apparent we need these standards. It is important we all learn each other's histories and how it impacts students in the classroom.

Question from Sen. Dembrow: Could you give us more information about the Educator Advancement Council?

EAC's Response: This [one pager](#) provides a brief overview of the goals and the work of the Educator Advancement Council.

Question from Sen. Dembrow: We know ODE is officially neutral on this bill, but could you tell us if you get the sense this would be helpful?

EAC's Response: The only way to make sure we are successful in enacting ethnic standards is to make sure we are supporting educators on the backend on how we teach differently. There needs to be robust ongoing work with educators in order to ensure the ethnic standards are deployed to support students of color. This is especially important given the large numbers of white educators in Oregon.

Senate Bill 232 - Diversification of Educator Workforce

Question from Sen. Dembrow: You mentioned educator pipelines. Tell us what some of the models are that are being explored for diversifying our educator workforce and what we could do to supplement them?

EAC's Response: We are in the initial funding cycle for pathway programs throughout the state of Oregon. There are currently many different models being offered to promote the diversification of our workforce. Some are focused on high school students, helping them understand what being an educator in the state of Oregon might look like; some are looking at the connection between school districts and community colleges to then an educator prep program. There are some that look directly at school districts straight to educator prep programs as well as community-based organizations partnering with educator prep programs or community colleges. I think the theme among these programs is the need for partnerships and the clarification of what are the different ways people can become educators within Oregon. It's about mitigating barriers between those transitions - starting young and letting students know about the pathways in secondary school and postsecondary. Then it also becomes about retention - what are the racially/culturally/linguistically affirming systems we need there to keep students in the programs? Then shifting into the transition of employment and continuing the partnership with school districts in hiring. There's a lot of different models being tested at this time, but sharing best practices among these programs is key to this work.

Question from Sen. Dembrow: Could you say something about the value of Grow Your Own programs as opposed to recruitment, job fairs, etc. for finding educators of color?

EAC's Response: What the pathways programs are really trying to do is to streamline the experiences and develop creative programs within the current system. Are there ways to smooth out that transition so that it's clear to the student, what is the next step? How are we thinking about mitigating barriers so that students see the potential of becoming an educator as something to look forward to? We also intend to intentionally network these programs to learn what is working, for whom, and under what conditions. We believe that these programs could help us understand more clearly how to dismantle barriers and create more racially affirming spaces beyond these programs.

Question from Sen. Dembrow: One area we do have significant amounts of diversity is with our classified staff, paraprofessionals, instructional assistants. Sometimes due to expense and time constraints, they are not able to get licensed. I would like us to focus on that workforce - they are already committed to this region. Do you have thoughts on this?

EAC's Response: In speaking with an ESD Superintendent, she mentioned that they surveyed their instructional assistants, and she found that 60% of them want to be teachers. A couple ideas that she was thinking about was the wall to wall funding of coursework - that everyone, not just teachers get access to classes. We have a couple of examples from our GYO programs that provide salary and benefits to continue or start programs. Some are giving time just to attend classes. Some of the Regional Educator Networks are looking at this as well. There's a lot of ideas out there and we intend to capture these initiatives. Also every year we produce [a report](#) that directly speaks to diversifying the educator workforce. The EAC works with TSPC, the HECC, ODE, and universities to produce this report. We just need to make sure we're not duplicating efforts and that we're all working together on this issue.

Question from Sen. Gorsek: Attracting teachers of color is very important; our student body is diverse, but our teachers at this point are not. Do you have some geographic focuses or is it a statewide approach?

EAC's Response: Regarding regional approaches to diversifying and retaining educators of color, we would point to the Regional Educator Networks - almost all of whom have retention as part of their regional plans. Many of the ideas embedded with the RENs are innovative and focused on creating racially affirming spaces for educators. Some examples are culturally relevant mentor training; equity support/training for school leadership; mentors of color for teachers of color; aligned, organized, and accessible regional professional learning for educators; etc. Teachers know what they need and are driving this work forward with the support and guidance of a REN Coordinator and Coordinating Body. Within its first full year, we are starting to see an impact on better supporting educators from recruitment to retirement.