



March 3, 2021

Chair Michael Dembrow
Vice-Chair Chuck Thomsen
Members of the Senate Education Committee

RE: [SB 744 – Relating to High School Diploma Requirements and Essential Skills](#)

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

As members of the **Oregon Partners for Education Justice**, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to **share our community-driven perspective on SB 744**.

We represent a cross-cultural network of community-based organizations, culturally specific service providers, and education advocates who are championing an inclusive, equitable, racially just, and community-centered public education system for Oregon. **In our 2021 Legislative Agenda (enclosed), the Oregon Partners for Education Justice is urging this Legislature to create an inclusive process to review Oregon’s high school diploma and Essential Skills requirements.**

Now more than ever, any review of Oregon’s graduation requirements must include the perspective of communities who have been historically underserved and disproportionately impacted by inequities embedded in our current system. It’s critical that Oregon’s diploma requirements and proficiency assessments ensure all students—especially Black students, Indigenous students, students of color, students experiencing poverty, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners—have access to the unique social, emotional, and academic support they need to thrive.

Oregon Partners for Education Justice is supportive of a comprehensive, equity-driven, and community-centered review of Oregon’s graduation requirements, which we believe can be accomplished by SB 744 with key modifications.

However, we cannot support the provision in the bill that indefinitely removes the authority of the State Board of Education to implement any future demonstration of proficiency through Essential Skills. We believe this step would be premature because it would prevent the State Board from implementing recommendations from the diploma requirement review outlined in SB 744.

Oregon Partners for Education Justice is eager to support SB 744 with amendments that:

- Maintain the State Board of Education’s authority to ensure Oregon’s education system is providing rigorous and relevant learning opportunities to all students.

- Ensure the diploma requirement review’s recommendations prioritize developing more equitable and inclusive requirements.
- Ensure the diploma requirement review undertakes an inclusive and transparent process that meaningfully engages historically underserved communities.
- Ensure the diploma requirement review is comprehensive by covering all of Oregon’s diploma options, including the standard diploma, modified diploma, extended diploma, and alternative certificate.
- Ensure the diploma requirement review utilizes disaggregated data to determine if current requirements have resulted in disparities or have been applied inequitably.

We urge this Committee to strengthen SB 744 with the above provisions and vote YES on a comprehensive review of diploma requirements, an essential step toward advancing a more inclusive, equitable, and racially just education system for Oregon’s children.

Sincerely,

Oregon Partners for Education Justice

Adelante Mujeres

Unite Oregon

Black Parent Initiative

Consejo Hispano

Asian Family Center

Africa House

Early Literacy Success Alliance

Self Enhancement, Inc.

Foundations for a Better Oregon

Oregon Business Council

Immigrant and Refugee Community

Organization (IRCO)

Asian Pacific American Network of

Oregon (APANO)

KairosPDX

FACT Oregon

Latino Network

Coalition of Communities of Color

Oregon Student Voice

EUVALCREE

REAP, Inc.

Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality

Stand for Children Oregon

Native American Youth and Family

Center (NAYA)

Oregon Coalition of Community

Charter Schools (ORC3S)

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ENCLOSED:

2021 Legislative Agenda – Oregon Partners for Education Justice

OREGON PARTNERS *for* EDUCATION JUSTICE

2021 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Across Oregon, families, educators, and communities are stepping up to make sure children aren't left behind. Now is the time to rethink how Oregon's public education system works with communities to support children and families who are disproportionately impacted by school closures and the ongoing injustice of systemic racism.

This community-driven agenda charts Oregon's next steps toward building an inclusive, equitable, and just public education system during and beyond COVID-19. **During the 2021 Legislative Session, the Oregon Legislature can make a difference in the lives of historically underserved children and families with policies and investments that:**

- Ensure distance learning and school reopening is fully accessible, engaging, and culturally responsive.
- Ensure every child has access to high-quality, culturally sustaining early learning opportunities.
- Promote anti-racist learning environments where every child feels like they belong.
- Recognize how critical community partners support children's unique learning, social, emotional, and cultural needs.

As Gov. Kate Brown proposed in her Recommended Budget for 2021-23, fully funding the landmark Student Success Act (SSA) is a clear path toward prioritizing equity as a core value of our public education system. By building on the promise of the SSA, we can create a public education system that works for all—especially Black children, Indigenous children, children of color, low-income children, children in rural communities, and far too many more who are underserved by the system as it stands.

WHO WE ARE

Oregon Partners for Education Justice is a cross-cultural network of community-based organizations, culturally specific service providers, and education advocates who are championing a racially just and community-centered public education system for Oregon. We believe in the vision, wisdom, and leadership of impacted communities, and advocate for equitable policies and investments that eliminate disparities and empower historically underserved children.

I. BUILD ON THE STUDENT SUCCESS ACT AS A FOUNDATION FOR EQUITY

SSA Early Learning Account

- Prioritize funding to expand access to **high-quality, culturally sustaining early learning programs**, including culturally specific early childhood and kindergarten transition programs.
- Prioritize investment in **professional development and pay equity for the early childhood workforce**.

SSA Student Investment Account

- Prioritize investments that **target support for historically underserved students**, who are now disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.
- Prioritize investments in **culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services** in partnership with communities.
- Require school districts to **engage historically underserved students and families in local planning and budgeting decisions**.

SSA Statewide Initiatives

- Prioritize investment in **Summer Learning Grants for Title I schools** to mitigate learning loss for low-income students, which is exacerbated by school closures.
- Increase investment in **Oregon's statewide equity plans**—including the **Black/African American, Latino/a/x, American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success Plans**—to honor community self-determination and invest in community-based organizations as partners supporting students.
- Support the **Educator Advancement Council** and other policies to recruit, train, and retain a **racially diverse educator workforce**; develop a statewide **anti-racism initiative for educators**; and create an **Indigenous Educators Institute**.

II. HOLD OUR PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM ACCOUNTABLE TO ALL STUDENTS

- To successfully implement Oregon’s statewide Ethnic Studies standards, **invest in anti-racist curriculum development and professional development for educators.**
- To effectively support every child’s social and emotional learning (SEL), **direct the State Board of Education to adopt equitable SEL content standards and provide technical assistance to school districts for implementation.**
- To ensure schools are effectively measuring student progress and success, **adopt an inclusive process to review Oregon’s high school graduation and “Essential Skills” requirements.**
- To prepare every young person for the future, **expand career-connected learning and youth employment opportunities (including STEM access) for historically underserved students.**
- To ensure the diverse and unique cultural traditions of our students are respected and celebrated, **allow tribal regalia to be worn at graduation ceremonies and school events.**
- To honor the many cultures of Oregon’s students and expand access to electives, **allow students to fulfill high school language arts requirements in languages other than English or through English Language Learner coursework.**
- To create a more coherent and equitable resourcing strategy for Oregon’s public education system, **increase transparency and accountability in how State School Fund dollars are spent at the local level.**

III. LIFT UP COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS IN A SHARED COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

Advancing equity requires including impacted communities in the policy process, from design to implementation to evaluation. This agenda stands in solidarity with communities across Oregon who are advocating for an equitable and racially just public education system for children during the 2021 Legislative Session:

Reimagine Oregon is uplifting policy solutions to stop the school to prison pipeline by addressing hate and bias incidents through Oregon’s anti-bullying laws; eliminating in-school arrests and zero tolerance discipline policies; and diverting funding from punitive measures to restorative justice practices.

Oregon’s Early Childhood Coalition is advocating for policies that address racial disparities in access to culturally responsive early learning opportunities, including eliminating suspension and expulsion in early care and education programs; mandating an Early Childhood Equity in Access report; urging Congress to keep children safe from ICE in early childhood settings; and supporting the creation of a Tribal Early Learning Hub to consult directly with Oregon’s nine federally recognized tribes.

OREGON PARTNERS *for* EDUCATION JUSTICE

We envision a racially just, community-centered public education system that supports every child with equitable access to safe, inclusive, and welcoming learning environments, ensuring all children in Oregon are empowered to grow into thriving global citizens.



Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality

