

I was lucky enough to have a few teachers of color during my education in Portland Public Schools. My first experience was in kindergarten. Mrs. West was African American and was my first experience in our educational system. She was warm, caring and so nurturing to me. Two things in particular stick out in my mind about my experience with her. She validated my cultural background by asking me to frequently share things about my Native American heritage with our class. She validated my knowledge and made me feel proud of my heritage. I also recall her sending me down to read with first graders instead of my kindergarten classmates. I'm not sure given all I know about how frequently giftedness is overlooked in students of color if this would have been my experience with a white teacher. The opportunity to have teachers of color throughout my educational experience has allowed me to be validated and at the same time pushed to be the best student I could be. Passing legislation to protect teachers of color who are students and families desperately need to see is critically important if we are serious about closing the achievement gap and increasing the success of students of color in our educational system. I urge you to pass this legislation.