



February 23, 2021

Regarding: Testimony to the Education Committee of the Oregon State Legislature, Teacher Diversity

Chair Teresa Alonso Leon
Vice-Chair Courtney Neron
Vice-Chair Suzanne Weber
Members of the House Education Committee

For the record, my name is Bekah Sabzalian. I am the equitable education program officer at Meyer Memorial Trust and a member of the Multnomah Clackamas Region Educator Network. I am Apache and Mexican American with family ties to the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. I'm also a licensed Oregon teacher.

For the last three years, Meyer has convened educators of color to learn what challenges and motivates them. A key theme emerges every year: isolation. Educators of color, especially those in districts with extremely low percentages of diverse teachers, feel overburdened and alone. Growing the number of diverse teachers is a critical strategy in retaining those already working in schools across the state.

An equitable education system demands Oregon's diverse students see themselves reflected in those guiding their education. We know, through research and lived experience, that diverse learning communities help to boost academic achievement, raise graduation rates and guard against bias.

Since 2017 Meyer Memorial Trust has invested over \$1.5 million in increasing the number of linguistically and culturally diverse educators in our public schools through grow your own and teacher pathway programs. These grants to Columbia Gorge Community College, Portland State University, Multnomah Education Service District, Oregon Coast Community College, Chemeketa Community College and more are developing and strengthening strategies to recruit diverse teachers. Through 2021, Meyer is committed to investing \$1 million more in similar programs, accelerating public investments made through the Educator Advancement

MEYER MEMORIAL TRUST

2045 N. Vancouver Ave., Portland, OR 97227
(503) 228-5512 | mmt.org

Council. But recruitment is not enough. To truly make these investments impactful, **we must retain the diverse teachers these efforts support.**

There is unprecedented coordination between districts, philanthropy, universities, state agencies and community organizations to comprehensively address the lack of diverse teachers in Oregon. As we face an uncertain economic future, which could result in teacher layoffs, I ask that you do all in your power to protect these investments. We must advance the growth and retention of this important resource for our students and for the future of Oregon's communities.

Respectfully,

Bekah Sabzalian
Equitable Education Program Officer

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



DIVERSE TEACHER REPRESENTATION POSITIVELY INFLUENCES STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT & BENEFITS ALL STUDENTS

EQUITABLE EDUCATION



Improved Academic and Behavioral Outcomes

Students of color often perform better on standardized tests, have improved attendance, and are suspended less frequently (which may suggest either different degrees of behavior or different treatment, or both) when they have at least one same-race teacher. [Source.](#)



Higher Graduation Rates

For a low-income Black male student in grades 3 through 5, being taught by at least one Black teacher reduces the probability of dropping out by 39% and increases the student's intent to pursue a four-year university degree by 29%. [Source.](#)



Diverse Learning Communities Benefit All Students

For white students, diverse learning communities provide exposure to multiple perspectives and can improve their ability to solve problems, think critically, and develop creativity. Having teachers from multiple racial backgrounds may increase white students' sense of civic engagement while offering important cognitive, social, and emotional benefits. [Source.](#)



1:179

Current Ratio of
Teachers of Color to
Students in Oregon

Increasing the number of teachers of color is not only a matter of a philosophical commitment to diversity in career opportunities. Teachers of color provide real-life examples to minority students of future career paths. In this way, increasing the number of current teachers of color may be instrumental to increasing the number of future teachers of color. [Center for American Progress](#)