



Senate Bill 1521

Sponsored by the Senate Education Committee

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP STABILITY BILL

The Challenge: Staff stability is best for students and current turnover among Oregon's superintendents is alarmingly high due to a number of factors - increasingly polarized politics within local communities and boards, an overwhelming amount of work serving students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic, a general staffing shortage and retirements, and the fact that superintendents can be dismissed "without cause" during their terms of employment.

BY THE NUMBERS

Between 2018-19 and 2021-22, there were 127 superintendent vacancies in Oregon, an average of almost 32 vacancies per school year. For the current school year, there were 43 superintendent vacancies. And so far, there are already 35 vacancies - with more expected - heading into the 2022-23 school year. This is out of a total of 216 positions in Oregon.

In some communities, our superintendents and school boards are facing a backlash that is unlike anything experienced before. Politics have distracted leaders from centering the needs of their students, focusing on equitable educational outcomes or implementing legally required public health and safety measures.

Our superintendents need basic employment protections, just like teachers, principals and other licensed K-12 educators. Under current law, superintendents are potentially risking their careers and livelihoods for following state or federal law, rules, and regulations.

The Opportunity: Oregon's superintendents need basic employment protections, just like teachers, principals and other licensed K-12 educators. Without these protections, district leaders are vulnerable to being fired for following the law or placed in the impossible position of having to defy directions from their employers. This legislation will allow superintendents to focus on providing educational leadership, stability, and continuity for our students, staff, and communities without working in fear of losing their jobs over political disagreements.

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THE BILL

To support district leadership stability, this bill will add basic employment protections to statute, including:

1. Prohibiting school boards from ordering superintendents to ignore or violate state and federal law, Oregon Administrative Rule, or any emergency directive or executive order that applies to school districts and education service districts;
2. Protections for superintendents from being fired for following the law or being disciplined for following these same rules and laws; and
3. Explicitly requiring both the board and superintendent to agree to any “without cause” termination language in contracts, and requiring a minimum of one year’s notice for a superintendent to be fired for “without cause.”

WHY IS THIS BILL IMPORTANT?

Leadership Stability Equals Improved Student Outcomes.

- Years of research and multiple studies confirm what we all know intuitively - stable leadership is critical for improving student outcomes and the success of our schools.
- “Leadership stability matters, especially at the district level, for frequent superintendent turnovers can have disruptive effects on staff morale, student performance, and organizational finance” ([Alsbury, 2008](#); [Banicki & Pacha, 2011](#); [Diem, Frankenberg, & Cleary, 2015](#); [Grissom & Andersen, 2012](#); [Grissom & Mitani, 2016](#)).

Attracting Diverse Superintendents.

- Without basic employment protections, diverse leaders will not be drawn to Oregon’s administrative ranks. Our leaders are not currently representative of the students they serve and we will not make real progress on diversifying the ranks of superintendents without basic employment rights in place.

Avoiding the “Domino Effect” and Unnecessary Costs for Taxpayers.

- Superintendent turnover negatively impacts leadership at the district level and often leads to the loss of additional district leaders and staff. This “domino effect” can disrupt district- and school-level efforts to best serve students, and can end up being very costly for districts and ESDs as they try to replace leaders - wasting taxpayer dollars that should be directed towards students.

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