

February 3, 2022

Thank you Chair and Members of the Education Committee for allowing the submission of my testimony today. My name is Melissa Goff, and I have held the role of superintendent for six years in Oregon. My evaluations have all been very positive during these years of service.

In July of 2021, a new Board majority took control of the Greater Albany school board. The only two Board members who remained on the Board had both voted in May and June in support of my positive evaluation and of updated contract terms reflecting my strong leadership in GAPS. Nevertheless, twelve days into the new Board's leadership, I was dismissed without cause.

The chaos that ensued disrupted the beginning of the school year for staff and students, caused anxiety and concern for many of our families, particularly families of color with whom I had worked closely, and cost Greater Albany Public Schools the equivalent of at least four full-time teaching positions. We are seeing even more dramatic negative impact in Newberg schools right now, thus emphasizing the need for Senate Bill 1521.

Many advocates spoke eloquently in favor of this bill on Tuesday, and I am sure we will have many more do so today. In contrast to their submissions, I wish to share with you evidence in the form of quotes from social media posts. I received these the afternoon of Tuesday, February 1, 2022.

The post screen shots are from a Facebook group called "Parents of GAPS". This group operates similarly to others across our state who are dissatisfied with school district leaders who are enforcing State law related to COVID protocols, equity, and inclusion. The original post is from GAPS Board Chair Eric Aguinaga and is a link to the Oregon Capital Chronicle article referring to this bill entitled, "Legislators consider shielding school superintendents from rash school board actions." There are many comments to the post, and these are a few excerpts:

GAPS School Board Chair Aguinaga writes:

"I've taken OSBA new member training twice, it was basically, shut up, do what ever your Superintendent says, and stay out of the way" (sic).

A parent replies:

"I don't doubt that, a bit. (sic) But it seems like there's a need for a group, not paid for by the State, to offer training on how the Oregon Constitution is set up, so board members understand Who they work for (the voters)...so the voters maintain control over the systems their tax dollars pay to support."

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A parent writes:

"If I understand this correctly our Democratic process of electing a school board is going to be overridden by the supermajority of Democrats in the Oregon House to make it harder for

communities to hold its school administration accountable?”

GAPS Board Chair Aguinaga replies:

“That’s what I’ve heard, when there is an opening outside of an election the legislators wants to be the ones to appoint the new school board member” (sic).

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The fallacies of these assumptions or confident replies are an outstanding example of why superintendents are in need of support to do the job for which they have been highly trained and hired. First of all, the OSBA training is specific in the roles of the school board and the roles of the superintendent. OSBA gives absolutely no direction to Board members to do whatever their superintendent says and to stay out of the way. On the contrary, the OSBA training refers directly to both federal and state laws regarding School Board responsibilities. One of their roles is to supervise the superintendent. Another is to ensure that they are adopting a budget and engaging in the fiduciary oversight of district budgeting and spending. Their other crucial role is the adoption of board policies so that our public schools have the policies needed to guide the work of the superintendent, the staff, and the parents. These are the leadership skills OSBA hopes to help their members develop.

Second, OSBA is not governed by or funded by the State of Oregon. One only needs to review pages 4 and 5 of their 2021-22 annual budget to see their sources of revenue. Finally, Chair Aguinaga uses this common statement to avoid accountability, “That’s what I’ve heard.” He then states this bill changes the procedure for filling Board vacancies outside of the election cycle. It does not.

I use this example because I do not believe it to be atypical of inaccurate communication being shared by some of our least responsible school board members with their constituents. They use these to build support for dismissals that are not related to accountability of a superintendent. If they were to build accountability, then there would be no need for “no cause”. The cause would be evident and would survive legal action.

I ask for your support of this bill so that our superintendents may do the work they are legally and ethically bound to do without the threat of an unwarranted dismissal. Our students and families, particularly those whom we continue to serve the least, need us to provide them with the reassurance that student safety and progress on creating equitable and inclusive learning environments will no longer be disrupted without justification.

Sincerely,

Melissa Goff