



Samoa Pacific Development Corporation

February 15, 2023

Honorable Chair Rep. Courtney Neron, Vice Chair Rep. Zach Hudson, Vice Chair Rep. Boomer Wright and Members of the House Committee on Education:

Talofa lava. My name is Jacinta Galea'i, Executive Director for Samoa Pacific Development Corporation. I submit this letter to support the HB -3144 Pacific Islander Student Success Plan.

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NH/PI) students in Oregon are experiencing academic and cultural marginalization that has put them behind on many measurements of academic success, including attendance, graduation, and college readiness.

NH/PI students also face higher rates of housing insecurity, which disrupts their ability to follow the routines crucial for academic success. According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy, one in four Pacific Islanders in the state fell below the federal poverty threshold and childhood poverty is linked to lower academic achievement. These negative social determinants for NH/PI existed before the pandemic but were worsened by the health and economic crisis.

As of 2021, 47% of NH/PI students in Oregon are chronically absent, and only 57.4% of NH/PI 9th grade students in Oregon were on track to graduate. That same year, NH/PI seniors in Portland Public Schools had a graduation rate of 73%, nearly 16% lower than White students and 20% lower than Asian students. The Coalition of Communities of Color 2018 Leading with Race Report found that Washington County NH/PI students with limited English proficiency score below their peers on standardized academic tests.

Studies show that students who experience academic success are those whose home languages and cultures closely resemble that of the school (Heath, 1982). Like other indigenous students, NH/PI students do not have the opportunities to learn and experience their culture, history, or language in Oregon schools. NH/PI youth in the Portland Public School system are rarely taught by educators who share their backgrounds.

Culturally-specific programs enable underserved communities to connect to cultural experiences that uplift and empower youth. Out-of-School Time programs can also mitigate or prevent

students from participating in risky behaviors such as violence, drug use, and other unsafe activities.

House Bill 3144, provides culturally specific investments and opportunities for Pacific Islander students in Oregon by giving them a chance to thrive and grow academically, socially and culturally.

On behalf of SPDC, I humbly ask that you support Pacific Islander youth by passing HB 3144. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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