

Submitter: Ravyn Cervantes
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

To the Senate Committee on Education,

I support this bill and believe it exemplifies Oregon's overdue efforts to reflect its diverse population.

I have only lived in Oregon for several years now. Through an educational course, I learned that when Oregon first became a US territory, it had a stipulation in its Constitution that banned Black people from living here on threat of physical punishment. The language of this stipulation was not removed from Oregon's Constitution until just several years ago. Its removal was controversial due to the original Constitution's venerated role in Oregon's "history." There will always be those for whom preserving the status quo is beneficial, even (or especially) when that preservation is symbolic. After all, there is nothing inherently obscene or pornographic about the existence of LGBTQ people or their contributions to Oregon and US society; to make this elision is to engage in blatant discrimination under the guise of concern for children's education. But preventing specific groups from being named in history textbooks does support an opponent's goal of dismissing and invalidating any perspectives that claim these identities.

In some ways, children's public education is less significant than we might think it is. It is less significant because it is just one of many sites of value development in children's lives, the most important and influential of which is the home. A child's family and personal life provides the framework of meaning through which other information is filtered. This is both a wonderful and terrible reality. For the purposes of this bill, however, it is significant because the State of Oregon's purview is not the innermost interior life of each child; that is not what is at stake. Public education is a function of society. It grounds us in our relationships with the wider world-- the public world that we participate in together. Public education does not (and should not) strive to dictate to children which identities are good or bad, or which people's perspectives are worth more than others. Rather, it acknowledges the very basic premise that none of us are the same, and yet there are still some things we should all be aware of as we move through our lives and encounter one another.

One can use many types of justification to argue why it is important NOT to include immigrants, refugees, Native Americans, Latine people, people with disabilities, or LGBTQ individuals in Oregon's public educational curriculum, but it should be clear that refusing to acknowledge these identities does not magically render them nonexistent in our communities. Privileging whatever one believes is the "base"

identity-- the one so obvious that it requires no description, usually premised on whiteness and a strict gender binary-- only sets up our children to be less well equipped to function in the reality of a diverse US society. At its best, an education creates a safe space for learners to sit with the discomfort of information that places their own lives in a wider context-- one in which they are not the sole protagonist. This recognition of one's place within a rich tapestry of humanity is absolutely vital for social development, and not just for children. Any educational journey that leaves someone with the conclusion that they are superior, blameless, and full of inarguably correct ideas is an irresponsible and dangerous one because it has failed to teach empathy. Empathy is not just a value; it is a learning practice, and it begins with not just accepting, but appreciating, the fundamental premise of difference. Each of us has an impact on those around us. Enclosing ourselves in the straitjacket of our own superior ideologies will cut us off from participating meaningfully in community with others.

Thank you for this effort to broaden the perspectives of Oregon's schoolchildren.

Sincerely,
Ravyn Cervantes