

Submitter: Charles Sanderson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Webber, and Committee Members,

My name is Charles Sanderson, and I have been a classroom teacher in Oregon public schools for 24 years. Prior to working in the classroom, I worked with homeless youth in Eugene, led youth conservation crews across the Northwest, and served young people affected by violence.

I am the 2020 Oregon Teacher of the Year for the Willamette region.

Currently, I am honored to serve students and families in Woodburn.

My students consistently win national contests, are published in national anthologies, and have performed at the Portland Book Festival and in front of thousands at the Arlene Schnitzer concert hall. My students present at National and Regional conferences, educating educational leaders on the practices and pedagogy that help them thrive and be their very best selves. My students are already leaders in our community, they found clubs committed to service, and one of them is off to Yale in the fall on a full ride scholarship.

It is important to know that these accomplishments are a product of my students' brilliance; however, they are also directly connected to what and how I teach. It is critical that all of my students—the white ones, the straight ones, the Brown ones, the gay ones, the indigenous ones, the female ones, the trans ones, the disabled ones, and absolutely every student sees themselves in the curriculum. They need to see their lives and the lives of their loved ones as having academic merit.

My students also need to see into and learn from others whose lived experiences and belief systems vary from their own. Lastly, my students need to develop skills to build bridges of empathy, affinity, and understanding with others—especially those who are being vastly different.

I don't indoctrinate any student. I see them. I hear them. I value them regardless of who they are and what they believe. I uplift their beliefs and highlight them as having value.

My most conservative and religious students are empowered to write about and speak about their lived experiences and beliefs in my classroom just as my trans kids are empowered to be their most authentic selves.

The language that is being used in Florida and other states to ban books is that we don't want students to feel uncomfortable; however, we all know that in order to grow, get stronger, and learn, we must experience discomfort.

My students aren't hurt when they lean into the discomfort of real history; rather, they are empowered. They are empowered to make right on the brilliance of our founding fathers that we are all created equal with certain unalienable rights. The rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We don't need to be afraid of ideas; we should be afraid of those who want to censor the free exchange of ideas, and trust that every parent has the capacity to raise their child to think deeply and critically about any text put in front of them.

And when we learn true history, yes, it should make us proud to be Americans and Oregonians. However, there are chapters that should also make us uncomfortable. The internment of Oregonians of Japanese ancestry should make us uncomfortable. The lynching of Alonzo Tucker in Coos Bay with an audience of 300 in broad daylight should make us uncomfortable. Our fellow Oregonians struggling with addiction or housing should make us uncomfortable.

Our students don't need to be protected from the truth. Rather, they need to learn the truth in order to help them navigate a complex world, and if they understand historical injustices, they are better prepared to recognize, address, and repair injustice they encounter today.

I humbly submit these remarks and appreciate any consideration you afford them. Thank you.