

To the Senate Committee on Education:

I oppose SB 683.

Proponents of the bill argue that “by knowing and understanding our past can we learn from our mistakes and build a better future.” But learning from our past is impossible without context, perspective, and factual accuracy, all of which are missing from this bill and the curriculum that it copies from (the 1619 project). James McPherson, past president of the American Historical Association, had this to say about the 1619 project: “I was disturbed by what seemed like a very unbalanced, one-sided account, which lacked context and perspective.”

This bill seeks to fill a hole in our curriculum that frankly does not exist. We do not need additional legislation to ensure that slavery and racist history are taught in Oregon public schools. Current state standards adopted in 2018 include multiple learning targets on slavery, oppression, marginalized people, and civil rights. The Oregon Department of Education’s most recent Social Science Newsletter highlights the plethora of resources available to teachers on these topics. In Oregon’s K-5 classrooms, social studies curriculum is primarily Native American history and Black history/civil rights. Slavery, oppression, and activism are covered extensively in 8th grade and in high school U.S. History/American Studies classes.

According to the 1776 Commission, educating citizens requires that students be taught “the principles that unite, inspire, and ennoble all Americans” which can “coexist with the elements of disappointment, criticism, dissent, opposition, and even shame.” “By studying America's true heritage, students learn to embrace and preserve the triumphs of their forefathers while identifying and avoiding their mistakes.” Senate Bill 683 runs counter to these goals, and in fact many of the goals found in Oregon’s state standards for civics instruction. This bill is divisive and rooted in critical theory. Its intent is not the teaching of history, but rather the teaching of grievance-mindedness and activism.

We do not need more curriculum mandates from Salem legislators. Social studies curriculum decisions should be made by historians and teachers. And school districts should have local authority to select appropriate materials for their communities.

I oppose SB 683 and urge you to oppose it also.

Mrs. Elizabeth Christensen