



February 10, 2021

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of Unite Oregon. Through our statewide chapters, our staff and volunteers have worked with more than 500 families since 2015 and one can't deny at least one consistency: students of color and their parents show up repeatedly for "multicultural nights" and affinity groups, but little changes when it comes to classroom curriculum that acknowledges our lived experiences in America.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share our organization's perspective and express our support for **SB 227**.

In 2017, Oregon passed historic legislation with bipartisan support to develop comprehensive statewide Ethnic Studies standards for K-12 public schools. Other states like Vermont and California have also introduced Ethnic Studies for K-12 schools. For so many young people in today's public schools, many students will never interact with a single teacher of color during their educational career, let alone read very little about ethnic history in their taxpayer-funded textbooks.

The Washington Post in 2019 [highlighted](#) the national problem with a staggering statistic showing that nearly all U.S. schools saw students of color **outpacing** teachers of color in enrollment. More importantly, this creates a situation that's easy to picture. Without enough teachers of color, students are deprived of an education that would reflect our culture and diverse communities, and they'd miss out on the beauty that people feel and achieve when friends of different cultures exchange ideas, whether in the classroom or on the playground.

Oregon's own enrollment figures show ethnically diverse teachers made up 11% of the state's 31,174 teachers, up 3 points from 2019, according to the [2020 Oregon Educator Equity Report](#). And while the year-over-year increase is great to see, those teachers must begin trailblazing a larger pool of ethnically diverse students, where nearly 4 in 10 students identify as black, indigenous, and people of color, or about 223,948 young Oregonians.

Through our BUILD (Building Undergraduates through Leadership Development) program, we've worked in partnership with Portland Public Schools staff to engage communities of color. Most of our parents and students come from low-income, immigrant and refugee, and BIPOC

communities. They have to address equities in our schools everyday. This legislation is an opportunity to address racism and its oppressive system for teachers to use as new tools to teach students about civic life and advocacy.

While we are hopeful about the legislation, we also recognize the challenges facing educators. We know passing this legislation is the first step but one of the most important. It provides a standardized curriculum, funds resources for materials, and increases classroom support, which we believe is the only way to ensure fidelity across the system. We hope you will make that investment.

Please vote YES on SB 227, an essential step toward advancing a more inclusive, equitable, and racially just education system for Oregon's children.

Sincerely,

**Inger McDowell-Hartye
BUILD Program Director
Unite Oregon**