



Date: April 30, 2021
To: House Rules Committee, Chair Smith Warner and Members
From: Jared Mason-Gere, Oregon Education Association Government Relations
RE: *Support for -6 amendments to HB 2001*

The Oregon Education Association, representing 41,000 educators across Oregon has made it a top priority of our organization to ensure Oregon's public schools better serve Black and indigenous students and other students of color, and to improve the diversity of the education workforce. It is well-understood that all students-BIPOC and white students alike- benefit when they interact with educators that are representative of the full diversity of our society and reflective of Oregon's increasingly diverse student population.

We know based on empirical data and anecdotal listening sessions and reports from the BIPOC (Black, indigenous and people of color) members we represent that the primary contributors to this current challenge come from failures to recruit and retain a diverse workforce that matches the student demographics- we have a student population that is over 40 percent diverse and rapidly approaching 50 percent- and a workforce that is at just 11 percent Black, indigenous and people of color. This isn't an issue that is particular to Oregon. Nationwide just over 20 percent of the education workforce are diverse, and only seven percent of the entire education workforce is Black.

As was indicated by OEA and a number of educators of color in the first hearing in the House Education Committee on the introduced version of HB 2001, there was and is a great deal of concern about the consequences of that version of the bill. Those concerns included: potential of the base bill to upset an orderly and objective competency and seniority-based system for reductions in force that created clearly understood protections for employees of all racial, ethnic and language backgrounds; opportunities for administrators to exhibit bias and favoritism; a very real likelihood that the criteria introduced in the base bill of HB 2001 could have led to the retention of white educators with second language skills over monolingual BIPOC educators.

We appreciate that after our concerns were raised, a workgroup was convened to find a way to thread the needle, attempting to strike a balance of complicated goals. From our perspective, those goals included:

1. Navigate the constraints of the constitution and court precedent that prohibits the use of affirmative action in layoff/reduction in force (RIF)
2. Retention of diverse educators;

3. Retention of the existing competency and seniority-based RIF system to the maximum degree possible;
4. Eliminate subjectivity or any opportunity for administrators to utilize favoritism or bias in making assignments that could advantage favored educators, or in particular serve as tools to discriminate against BIPOC educators or further burden them with additional work requirements;

Many education stakeholders have now worked on this issue for over two months, attempting to balance these competing needs. We believe the -6 amendments do an admirable job in striking this balance.

To be clear- we do not believe that layoffs are an appropriate tool used to improve the diversity ratio of the education workforce, and we as a state should ensure that reductions in force continue to be extremely rare. As part of this effort, the legislature should increase school funding and set a budget of \$9.6 billion this session to ensure that there are no layoffs at all in this budget cycle.

It is important that the legislature understand that there is a lot more work to do and that layoff is the least important aspect of our statewide education workforce diversity efforts. Recruitment and retention of BIPOC educators will be the most consequential and impactful areas to focus, and if the legislature takes the time to listen to the voices of BIPOC educators, they will understand the many factors that need to be addressed in order to help more educators of color enter the profession and remain in it to serve students throughout their career.

This session, the legislature should pass, among other bills, SB 232, SB 732, HB 3354, HB 2166, HB 2501 to address some of the diversity and equity issues in education.

Then over the coming months, we must put the voices of BIPOC educators front and center in these conversations and take their input to craft policy and budget proposals for the 2022 and 2023 legislative sessions that focus on true retention of diverse educators. We have a very high rate of attrition in the education workforce in Oregon- dramatic numbers of educators leave the profession within the first five years of their career, and that rate is almost 25 percent higher for BIPOC educators.

We hear from educators that a number of issues contribute to that attrition. Those include pressure to take on greater workloads; stress and responsibility that comes with shouldering the weight of meeting all needs of students of color ; disproportionate targeting for plans of assistance, discipline, and non-renewals of contracts; lack of input and flexibility to adjust curriculum that might not meet the needs of diverse students; lack of available and appropriate mentorship; and a host of other concerns.

Please adopt the -6 amendments to HB 2001. Then please join with us to make true gains in the realm of recruitment and retention to ensure the education system is welcoming to BIPOC educators, and in turn that the education workforce is more representative of and responsive to the entire population it serves.