



May 3, 2021

To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

From: Katie Lenahan, MPH
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Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain and members of the committee,

When *On Track* was first implemented, it was important to OHSU that the program provided opportunities and resources that the *community* identified as important. To achieve this, each of our community partners has been involved in the co-creation of the program and continues to advise us in order to adapt and refine the structure of the *On Track* program. We've partnered with school district administrators, teachers, Tribal leaders, students, and parents. Because of this, we can point directly to changes that have been made based on the feedback of community members. For example, graduating seniors let us know early on that while junior and senior *On Track* activities were very engaging, the earlier high school visits weren't as impactful. We took this feedback and brainstormed ways to increase the hands on and interactive components of the early high school programming for an improved student experience, and have seen a big shift in the participation of our 9th and 10th grade students.

In addition to growing this program with the input of our community partners, it is also important that program staff fully represent the students, so that the program is culturally specific and relatable. To achieve this, we have program staff in what we call Community Based Positions. These are full time staff who are employed by OHSU and part of the *On Track* team, but who work and live in the same community as the students they work with. Often the person in this role has graduated from the same high school as the students in the *On Track* program, and so can speak directly to the strengths and challenges that exist for students. These Community Based Positions allow for our staff to build long term connections with students and parents, supporting students in their educational journeys well past high school.

The importance of having these embedded community based positions have been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers and families were overwhelmed, and so many were unable to respond to outreach programs offering support. However the relationships and trust we've built with our community partners allowed us to quickly shift to a virtual platform and connect with students and teachers in a variety of creative ways early on. Over the summer, our team built four separate community advisory groups – a more formal way to bring community members together to gather feedback on how to adapt to the changing school requirements during the 2020-21 academic year. We had incredible interest and response to these advisory groups, which included students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other community based organizations. Based on the feedback of these groups, and the ongoing feedback from students after virtual events, we have been able to adapt the *On Track*

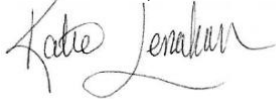
program to meet the very different structures and needs of our *On Track* sites, None of this would have been possible without the community based positions and the relationships they have built over the years.

The *On Track* program provides engaging and hands on activities in health and science fields to increase students' interest in, awareness of, and preparation for health and science degrees and careers. Each volunteer and presenter that works with our program has an impact on students, and often during events you can see a spark of interest light up in a group of students. But without the Community Based Staff, this spark may very well fade or get lost in the complexity of figuring out the next step. However, with the *On Track* model, each student has someone in their community who can help take this spark and figure out what comes next for them, whether that is getting more exposure to the field or figuring out the best next steps for the student's education. This relationship based approach is critical to supporting marginalized students break past the barriers they may face and work towards their own career interests so they can better serve the health and wellbeing of their own communities. Sustainable support from the state would allow us to continue to grow the Community Based Positions so that more students could benefit from the experiences and mentorship that *On Track* provides.

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you all about this critical diversity initiative. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Katie Lenahan, MPH

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie Lenahan". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the printed name.

Director of On Track OHSU!