



February 24, 2021

Chair Michael Dembrow  
Vice-Chair Chuck Thomsen  
Members of the Senate Education Committee

**RE: [SB 328 – Relating to Data on Suspensions and Expulsions](#)**

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

As members of the **Oregon Partners for Education Justice**, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to share our community-driven perspective and **express our support for SB 328**.

We represent a cross-cultural network of community-based organizations, culturally specific service providers, and education advocates who are championing an inclusive, equitable, racially just, and community-centered public education system for Oregon. **We are proud to stand with the Reimagine Oregon Project and endorse the concept underpinning SB 328 in the Oregon Partners for Education Justice 2021 Legislative Agenda (enclosed).**

Over the last decade, the Legislature has passed bipartisan legislation to remove zero tolerance policies from Oregon statute and prohibit most suspensions and expulsions in grades K–5. These important reforms recognized that **exclusionary discipline practices—including suspension and expulsion—deprive students of critical instructional time and prop up the school-to-prison pipeline**. Research analysis by Education Northwest shows students who are suspended are more likely to repeat a grade, drop out, and be pushed into the juvenile justice system.<sup>1</sup>

While progress has been made, the challenge remains: Too often, Oregon schools are defaulting to suspension and expulsion rather than addressing students’ mental and behavioral needs. Moreover, **exclusionary discipline is a fundamental equity issue, perpetuating unacceptable disparities in opportunity, access, and outcomes for historically underserved students**. The consequences of systemic racism couldn’t be clearer when Black and Indigenous students are disciplined at twice the rate of their white peers, according to the Oregon Department of Education.<sup>2</sup>

To reverse these persistent statewide trends, **communities and policymakers need access to transparent and actionable data about suspensions and expulsions at the school district and**

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<sup>1</sup> Burke, A., & Nishioka, V. ( 2014). [Suspension and Expulsion Patterns in Six Oregon School Districts](#). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest.

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Department of Education (2020). [2019-2020 Oregon Statewide Report Card](#).

**school building levels.** SB 328 would meet this need by supporting public transparency about the frequency and patterns of exclusionary discipline in every Oregon school, including disaggregated data by student grade, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status. This disaggregated data is essential to understanding how exclusionary discipline impacts historically underserved students in communities across Oregon.

**In addition, to reinforce Oregon's commitment to transparency and ensure our education system supports to the well-being of every student, we ask this Committee to consider strengthening SB 328 in the following ways:**

- Require the Oregon Department of Education to publish disaggregated data about in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions at the school level, as well as by grade level and demographics.
- Require the Oregon Department of Education to include suspension and expulsion data to be included in annual 'at-a-glance' school and school district profiles, ensuring families and communities have access to clear and digestible information about exclusionary discipline at their children's schools.

**SB 328 will elevate the data Oregon needs to make restorative justice in school a reality.** As Oregon students return to in-person learning, we cannot return to the status quo. Instead of suspending and expelling students, schools must use culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices to support students struggling with mental and behavioral health after the disruption of COVID-19.

**Please vote YES on SB 328, an essential step toward advancing a more inclusive, equitable, and racially just education system for Oregon's children.**

Sincerely,

**Oregon Partners for Education Justice**

Adelante Mujeres	Organization (IRCO)
Unite Oregon	Asian Pacific American Network of
Black Parent Initiative	Oregon (APANO)
Consejo Hispano	KairosPDX
Asian Family Center	FACT Oregon
Africa House	Latino Network
Early Literacy Success Alliance	Coalition of Communities of Color
Self Enhancement, Inc.	Oregon Student Voice
Foundations for a Better Oregon	EUVALCREE
Oregon Business Council	REAP, Inc.
Immigrant and Refugee Community	Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality

Children's Institute  
Stand for Children Oregon  
Native American Youth and Family

Center (NAYA)  
Oregon Coalition of Community  
Charter Schools (ORC3S)

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**ENCLOSED:**

2021 Legislative Agenda – Oregon Partners for Education Justice

# OREGON PARTNERS *for* EDUCATION JUSTICE

## 2021 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Across Oregon, families, educators, and communities are stepping up to make sure children aren't left behind. Now is the time to rethink how Oregon's public education system works with communities to support children and families who are disproportionately impacted by school closures and the ongoing injustice of systemic racism.

This community-driven agenda charts Oregon's next steps toward building an inclusive, equitable, and just public education system during and beyond COVID-19. **During the 2021 Legislative Session, the Oregon Legislature can make a difference in the lives of historically underserved children and families with policies and investments that:**

- Ensure distance learning and school reopening is fully accessible, engaging, and culturally responsive.
- Ensure every child has access to high-quality, culturally sustaining early learning opportunities.
- Promote anti-racist learning environments where every child feels like they belong.
- Recognize how critical community partners support children's unique learning, social, emotional, and cultural needs.

**As Gov. Kate Brown proposed in her Recommended Budget for 2021-23, fully funding the landmark Student Success Act (SSA) is a clear path toward prioritizing equity as a core value of our public education system.** By building on the promise of the SSA, we can create a public education system that works for all—especially Black children, Indigenous children, children of color, low-income children, children in rural communities, and far too many more who are underserved by the system as it stands.

### WHO WE ARE

Oregon Partners for Education Justice is a cross-cultural network of community-based organizations, culturally specific service providers, and education advocates who are championing a racially just and community-centered public education system for Oregon. We believe in the vision, wisdom, and leadership of impacted communities, and advocate for equitable policies and investments that eliminate disparities and empower historically underserved children.

# **I. BUILD ON THE STUDENT SUCCESS ACT AS A FOUNDATION FOR EQUITY**

## **SSA Early Learning Account**

- Prioritize funding to expand access to **high-quality, culturally sustaining early learning programs**, including culturally specific early childhood and kindergarten transition programs.
- Prioritize investment in **professional development and pay equity for the early childhood workforce**.

## **SSA Student Investment Account**

- Prioritize investments that **target support for historically underserved students**, who are now disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.
- Prioritize investments in **culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services** in partnership with communities.
- Require school districts to **engage historically underserved students and families in local planning and budgeting decisions**.

## **SSA Statewide Initiatives**

- Prioritize investment in **Summer Learning Grants for Title I schools** to mitigate learning loss for low-income students, which is exacerbated by school closures.
- Increase investment in **Oregon's statewide equity plans**—including the **Black/African American, Latino/a/x, American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success Plans**—to honor community self-determination and invest in community-based organizations as partners supporting students.
- Support the **Educator Advancement Council** and other policies to recruit, train, and retain a **racially diverse educator workforce**; develop a statewide **anti-racism initiative for educators**; and create an **Indigenous Educators Institute**.

## **II. HOLD OUR PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM ACCOUNTABLE TO ALL STUDENTS**

- To successfully implement Oregon’s statewide Ethnic Studies standards, **invest in anti-racist curriculum development and professional development for educators.**
- To effectively support every child’s social and emotional learning (SEL), **direct the State Board of Education to adopt equitable SEL content standards and provide technical assistance to school districts for implementation.**
- To ensure schools are effectively measuring student progress and success, **adopt an inclusive process to review Oregon’s high school graduation and “Essential Skills” requirements.**
- To prepare every young person for the future, **expand career-connected learning and youth employment opportunities (including STEM access) for historically underserved students.**
- To ensure the diverse and unique cultural traditions of our students are respected and celebrated, **allow tribal regalia to be worn at graduation ceremonies and school events.**
- To honor the many cultures of Oregon’s students and expand access to electives, **allow students to fulfill high school language arts requirements in languages other than English or through English Language Learner coursework.**
- To create a more coherent and equitable resourcing strategy for Oregon’s public education system, **increase transparency and accountability in how State School Fund dollars are spent at the local level.**

## **III. LIFT UP COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS IN A SHARED COMMITMENT TO EQUITY**

Advancing equity requires including impacted communities in the policy process, from design to implementation to evaluation. This agenda stands in solidarity with communities across Oregon who are advocating for an equitable and racially just public education system for children during the 2021 Legislative Session:

**Reimagine Oregon** is uplifting policy solutions to stop the school to prison pipeline by addressing hate and bias incidents through Oregon’s anti-bullying laws; eliminating in-school arrests and zero tolerance discipline policies; and diverting funding from punitive measures to restorative justice practices.

**Oregon’s Early Childhood Coalition** is advocating for policies that address racial disparities in access to culturally responsive early learning opportunities, including eliminating suspension and expulsion in early care and education programs; mandating an Early Childhood Equity in Access report; urging Congress to keep children safe from ICE in early childhood settings; and supporting the creation of a Tribal Early Learning Hub to consult directly with Oregon’s nine federally recognized tribes.

# OREGON PARTNERS *for* EDUCATION JUSTICE

We envision a racially just, community-centered public education system that supports every child with equitable access to safe, inclusive, and welcoming learning environments, ensuring all children in Oregon are empowered to grow into thriving global citizens.



Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality

