



**Testimony of Oregon Community Foundation on HB 2166-1
February 23, 2021**

Belle Cantor, OCF Senior Program Officer for Education

Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the House Committee on Education:

I'm Belle Cantor and am the Senior Program Officer for Education at the Oregon Community Foundation.

Oregon Community Foundation urges you to support HB 2166 as amended.

As a community foundation, we can engage in direct advocacy on legislation and we use that instrument for key opportunities that are highly aligned with our priorities and are critical to reduce the opportunity gap for our children.

We support HB 2166 as amended as a whole but today want to focus on the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) portion. Developing content standards that focus on high quality, trauma-informed SEL skills and tools among providers, and thus well-being among children who are most adversely impacted (BIPOC and other under resourced children), needs to be done in partnership with culturally-specific community based programs to ensure relevancy and success.

In alignment with research about how high-quality SEL opportunities positively impact student success, OCF has invested deeply in SEL through much of our K-12 focused funding. Our goal in doing so is to support student success by narrowing the opportunity and subsequent achievement gaps experienced by students of color, low-income students and students from under resourced rural communities. We are doing this through grants to organizations with deep knowledge of these students' experiences.

SEL is a process that helps students develop the attitudes, knowledge and skills that foster resilience, persistence and positive relationships. A growing body of research shows that SEL is a key determinant of students' academic success, engagement, and behavior—while also preventing many adverse behaviors. Students in high-quality SEL programs show significant increases in academic performance, including graduation rates.

Many trauma informed SEL models that grow out of culturally specific programs attempt to build resiliency through the use of neuroscience findings and reflective practices and are essential to reversing the harmful impacts of toxic stress and trauma that children face. They are also based on the understanding that children of color face disproportionate amounts of trauma and stress related to their race regardless of socio-economic status. The ability to mitigate this becomes crucial to learning.

Many community-based youth development programs are serving students who have historically been marginalized and denied opportunity in a public education system built primarily for white, middle class students. The staff and students at these programs are the

experts in SEL for their populations and need to be at the table when statewide SEL content standards and related supports are developed.

Strong partnerships need to be developed and maintained between these community-based programs and the formal school system. Each are but one piece of the broader student experience and cannot close the opportunity gap alone. Systemic change in education is needed to address structural racism and resource barriers to eliminate these gaps.

Please consider OCF as a resource and partner in this area.