

Submitter: Annalivia Palazzo-Angulo
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB4112

My name is Annalivia Palazzo-Angulo and today I am writing in support of HB 4112: Professional Development for Ethnic Studies. This funding is critical to providing quality professional development and supports for teachers in order to implement the newly adopted Ethnic Studies standards in K-12 schools.

You've heard the stories regarding the need for Ethnic Studies. My story is as a teacher—about implementing what is needed to enrich curriculum and lesson plans to not only fulfill the standards but benefit all students immensely.

Most teachers of color probably have enough background and experience to enrich their lessons appropriately, but there are mighty few teachers of color in Oregon!

As an Oregonian my whole life, I attended Salem Keizer Schools in the 1960's, where I was called names because of my ethnicity and read text books filled only with white people, especially blonde girls. I dropped out of high school for ONE reason. I did not see myself as belonging anywhere.

When I went to college and became a teacher in the year 2000, I knew how important it was for my students to see themselves and be validated for their experiences. Even in the year 2000, textbooks had not improved significantly and were not inclusive. It was incredible to see the lack of knowledge, both in text and in teachers, in their supporting materials, artwork, etc.

Being who I am, it was obvious. To the other teachers, almost all white, it was not obvious—in fact most were oblivious.

A particularly difficult experience was in the required teaching our famous American Author Mark Twain in the beloved Huck Finn, traditionally taught nationwide. But I had heard and read outrageous stories and controversy about the book. My step-daughter in Salem had to change schools because of the extreme insensitivity of that teacher that nearly ruined her 10 grade year.

I happen to believe that we SHOULD be teaching books such as Huck Finn, just as we must teach other difficult literature in high school. But since most teachers DON'T know how to teach it, the resulting nationwide outcry about requiring Huck Finn is sadly justified.

Since I had my past experiences, and my focused studies in college--in Sociology, Black History, Film, Literature, and the like--it was a no-brainer for me to create a curriculum for 10th grade English around Huck Finn. And all my students, many of color, appreciated it greatly.

It was simple: I used black authors of the same time period, the local and national history of the book's setting, and the biography of the author. I brought those together into my curriculum to read alongside the book as comparisons and contexts. We studied the author and I had open discussion and debate.

But I learned that NONE of the teachers around me – all white—had ever done

anything like this. NONE of the online or paper resources to go with the book included any mention of the history of slavery and racism implicit or explicit on every page of Huck Finn. It was my first year and I had to create the whole curriculum myself. There were no resources for me anywhere and no more experienced teachers or training for me, even in college.

Many teachers would be happy to know more, as long as plenty of support is there for them. They are stressed and seriously overworked. Re-inventing the wheel at every school and in every classroom is a huge obstacle and very discouraging to many teachers. We cannot expect them to just “know” what has not been known to them before. Many have not been aware of the significant lack of acknowledgement of the cultures and races and experiences of the students in the room. There is no reason to make them feel guilty and lost. This bill, HB 4112, is as critical as the standards that were adopted. The one without the other would almost be punitive to many of our teachers across the state, especially in districts with a significant lack of access to good training and material supports.

I strongly urge you to support HB 4112.