



February 15, 2022

TO: House Education Committee
FR: Superintendent Sue Rieke Smith
RE: SB 1521 Testimony

Good Afternoon Chair Alonso Leon and members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Sue Rieke-Smith and I am the Superintendent of the Tigard-Tualatin School District, proudly serving a diverse population of 11,700 talented students. Passage of Senate Bill 1521 during the 2022 Session is critical to ensuring school district superintendents across Oregon can focus on the critical work of leading their districts to meet the academic and social emotional needs of all of Oregon's students.

The Negative Impacts of Superintendent Turnover

You have heard my colleagues share how the bill would work and why it is needed. Please consider how high superintendent turnover negatively impacts leadership at the district level and often leads to the loss of additional district leaders and staff. This turnover not only disrupts district- and school-level efforts to best serve students, but is very costly for districts and ESDs as they try to replace leaders – wasting taxpayer dollars that should be directed towards students and the programs that support them.

When an effective superintendent is fired for “no cause,” or for following the law, it not only robs Oregon's students of caring and connected educators, it has a chilling effect on our ability to recruit and retain the next generation of caring education leaders when they correctly perceive that they are vulnerable to the political disagreements that are occurring in many communities across our state.

What is at Risk without Passage of Senate Bill 1521

As it currently stands, our superintendents lack the basic statutory employment protections that their fellow educators enjoy. They are vulnerable to being fired without cause as a result of enforcing the rule of law and aligning the district's vision and mission with the state's equity of academic outcomes stance. We worry that without protections, our academic equity leaders, especially our women leaders and leaders of color, will be disproportionately impacted.

- *A 2017 study conducted by Kansas State University posited that the “lack of female representation was a problem not only because of fairness and equity, but also because diversity brings improvement in leadership and learning. (Robinson, K., Shakeshaft, C., Grogan, M., & Newcomb, W. S. (2017, April)). This is especially true for female superintendents of color. To quote Dr. Diaz and my colleague, Dr. Parent, “When 72% of teachers nationwide are women but less than 25% are*



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*superintendents – and even fewer are superintendents of color – there is a problem.
(Krista Parent, COASA)*

Right now, Oregon is at risk of going backwards as a state in promoting and advancing equity work, thus fulfilling the promise of the Student Success Act. We are risking our ability to recruit and retain a diverse group of women and people of color to become administrators and to aspire to the role of superintendent, the very individuals all students need to see as role models in their schools and districts. More diverse leaders will not be drawn to Oregon superintendencies without strong assurances that they can focus on the work of educating students without the fear of losing their job at a moment's notice.

I am asking for your support in the passage of this bill. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the committee today. My colleagues and I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.