



TINA KOTEK  
GOVERNOR

February 12, 2024

Senator Michael Dembrow  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education  
900 Court Street NE, S-407  
Salem, OR 97301

Representative Courtney Neron  
Chair, House Committee on Education  
900 Court Street NE, H-281  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Dembrow and Chair Neron,

Thank you for your leadership and partnership in advancing education policy in Oregon.

I am writing in regard to Senate Bill 1550 and the work ahead to stabilize the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC). We share the goals of building and diversifying the educator workforce across the state and the need for a more coordinated education system, as well as the need to address specific issues at TSPC including catching up on the existing licensing backlog.

As directed by Senate Bill 275 (2023), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the TSPC consulted with the Educator Advancement Council (EAC) to examine whether to merge TSPC into ODE. The December 2023 report noted the risk of moving the agency into ODE's authority without effectively improving the system. We need to improve both the function and structure of the agency, and I believe that ensuring the agency is meeting its core responsibilities should take precedence before we move forward with any plans for a merger with ODE. As the report notes, a merger would redirect the agency's focus from core services, such as addressing their licensing backlog.

In October 2023, the TSPC appointed Melissa Goff to serve as the interim director. Given the findings in the SB 275 report, I have great hesitation about conducting a major structural shift among our education agencies while we are in the process of stabilizing core functions, including customer service and cost containment. ODE is also mid-implementation of many key legislatively directed projects and has a relatively new director. I believe we must have more stability first and then determine the correct structural changes. One part of those ongoing stabilization efforts is to bring on more staff at TSPC to address the licensing backlog.

Additionally, the report commissioned by SB 275 estimated that the net personnel cost of implementing the merger of TSPC into ODE is nearly \$2 million. I have concerns about this estimated price tag, particularly given that a primary concern we share about the current structure is the high costs of licensure to fund TSPC. The report indicates there would not be cost savings

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through a potential merger at this time. However, TSPC has identified additional funding that, in the near term, can provide the staffing needed to address issues like the licensing backlog, as well as other potential savings through moving to existing state office building space in Salem.

You have my commitment that in lieu of a bill this session, my office and I will support work in the summer and fall to build consensus around a plan that addresses the goals outlined in your bill. This work can occur as TSPC has more time to hire and catch up on its existing licensing backlog.

Additionally, my hope is that there can be a holistic review of the supports for the educator workforce through the TSPC, the EAC, and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Each of these agencies has a role in teacher preparation and share a focus on adult learners, while ODE is focused on serving the K-12 population. This would also provide an analysis of how we can provide better support for and collaboration with educator preparation programs at Oregon colleges and universities.

Once again, thank you for your service to Oregon, and I look forward to continued collaboration on how to improve coordination within our education system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tina Kotek". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tina" being more prominent than the last name "Kotek".

Governor Tina Kotek