

Submitter: Jen Loeung
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

In our line of work, we all understand that it is important for students to see themselves reflected in their community. Educators ensure there are materials that do just that by carefully selecting books, magazines, educational videos and experiences that reflect our student populations in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. As we see the effects of isolation play out in classrooms across the state, this is the time to prioritize belonging and welcoming schools for all in Oregon.

I strongly oppose Senate Bill 1583 as it actually widens the gap of discrimination. I've taught for more than 25 years k- college level. Oregon is an interesting state; I've seen students, from teaching intervention, English Language Learning, English and speech and debate classes, as well as having coached a diverse team for more than 20 years. I've repeatedly heard how students do not feel represented in class. Most of my Mexican - American students are so uncomfortable with assignments that do not reflect any of their beliefs or culture. My eastern European students feel marginalized by the content taught. Many of my Muslim students feel like they are not tolerated, and I've had staff who refuse to grade a paper for a Christian student when they were asked to write about the most influential person that has made a difference in their life, simply because they chose to write about Jesus (I've seen this issue as far back as 1999).

Students need to feel affirmed in order to learn, yet the numbers are clear that we have a long way to go. In my district, I am seeing multiple Eastern European students and other Christian families withdraw from public school because they have little voice and representation. This is an alarming trend and we are seeing staff cut due to lower student enrollment. We need students from all walks of life to know that they belong. We need them to have access to perspectives about themselves in the community.

This bill intends to rectify students not feeling represented. However, as a parent and educator, I have witnessed that a universal approach/curriculum actually isolates more students due to under representing opposing viewpoints. All students should be given the opportunity to work through viewpoints that challenge their own, be it from small rural towns like Long Creek, Oregon or from large cities such as Portland.

This bill actually discriminates against our students by taking away the right to see themselves reflected in their school.

But one tool we can rely on for representation is the diverse range of materials that represent all students, be they LGBTQ+, Muslim, Christian or Jewish. SB 1583 takes away this diverse representation.