

Submitter: Gail Greaney
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

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I am a public school educator and the parent of 10 children who have all attended Oregon public schools. In my current position I teach A.P. Government, A.P. U.S. History, and Film. In addition, I am serving as our part-time teacher librarian at the high school. In all of those capacities--both as a professional educator and as a parent--I have steadfastly believed in our children. I believe that they are amazing humans who have unlimited potential. I believe that they deserve an education that trusts them to think critically and to behave generously. I believe that they deserve the truth and the opportunity to struggle when the truth challenges them--and then to come out on the other side of that struggle a stronger and wiser person than before they were ever challenged in the first place.

I have never thought that the goal of a public education--or any education, for that matter--is to try to keep students ignorant and to instill a fear of new ideas and different points of view. The goal of a public education, in essence, is to guide students along the path of answering the question "How then should I lead my life." This is why we study art and history and math and science. This is why we learn foreign languages and read novels and do science experiments. We engage in these pursuits in order to engage in the world around us, to gain a deeper understanding of who we are and what we treasure. We pursue knowledge in order to figure out not only who, but how, we want to be in this world.

When we limit what students can know, when we restrict what they can learn, we are telling them we don't believe in them. We are telling them that they lack the ability to understand things, to weigh ideas and actions, that they are not capable and should stay in small spaces rather than venture out into the larger world. We make their world small, at best, hostile and frightening at worst.

Every student has a right to knowledge and exploration. Every student has a right to see themselves in the stories that they hear and the history that they study and the thinkers they admire. Public schools are just that--public. They are not spaces meant to be controlled and curated by fear and intolerance. They are meant to show every student, every day, in every possible place, that they matter just as they are. That they can walk through those doors each morning knowing that they can be their authentic selves and through the curriculum they are presented that they are not alone. That people of their same race, religion, gender expression, and sexual orientation are part of this amazing place we call home. That others have struggled

with the same questions and doubts, and have gone on to live lives full of wonder and beauty.

While providing a meaningful education to every child in this state can seem a monumental task, the first step is really quite simple. Believe. Believe in our students and our educators and in the dignity of every single person who enters our public schools. Believe that our students deserve access to textbooks, instructional materials and library books that reflect both who they are and who they hope to become.

Which leads to the second step--pass this bill.

The mission of the public school is to make a space for everyone at the table, and to recognize that we are richer because of the unique qualities that each of us brings. That we are ALL tasked with building a public educational system that makes it a safe space for all of us to wonder, question, learn, and grow.

Passing SB 1583 is one step toward achieving that mission.