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Dr. Charlene Williams

Director of the Department of Education

SB 141 -1: Shared Accountability
Senate Education Committee
March 12, 2025

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of the amendment to SB 141. For the record my name is Dr. Charlene Williams and I serve as the Director of the Oregon Department of Education.

I'd like to begin by saying that ODE shares the Governor's, the Legislature's, and the public's concern about the state of education in Oregon. Our scholars deserve a world-class education. We can and we must do better. I'm here today to bring forward full-support for shared accountability – one where we drive change through a unified vision—from the Capitol to the classroom. One where school districts are accountable for state funding, progress is being monitored and a continuum of supports provided. At ODE, this means taking deliberate action to improve internal operations, efficiencies and support for school districts.

As I was preparing for today, I was really trying to figure out how I would convey to so many passionate folks about why this work feels like such a tremendous opportunity. **This is a moment to renew hope in education with both the clarity and support our schools and students deserve.** When we get really clear about what we know the best educational experience looks like for Oregon scholars, when we have a deep understanding of well-being, care, learning, and the kinds of experiences that foster growth, and when we give careful thought to the conditions and resources it takes to get them there, we will be unstoppable as a state.

Please indulge me for a brief moment of storytelling to help frame my hope for this work. When I walked onto the Roosevelt campus over a decade ago as a small school administrator, I had no idea what I was about to learn about this special school and community. In a matter of months I learned that we were designated as one of the lowest performing schools in the state. Someone said, "Welcome to Roosevelt."

When I began to socialize this with staff about what this meant, our options were one of four models:

- Turnaround
- Restart



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- School Closure or
- Transformation.

I will never forget calling in a core group of teacher leaders who literally burst into tears at various points of the conversation, recalling over a collection of decades of experience every iteration of reform and attempt made to *fix* Roosevelt. They felt condemned, devalued, and that their experience and expertise did not matter. One teacher recalled that between assistant principals, small school administrators, campus principals, in her 20 years at Roosevelt she had experienced over **40** different administrators. Community listening sessions were not much better and it took an inordinate amount of time and effort to rebuild trust to get them to even consider engaging in this new round of “accountability” and “resources.” Thankfully, through herculean efforts on behalf of so many, folks bought in and eventually owned ***Roosevelt on the Rise***. It was rough, nonlinear, and yet thoughtful, strategic, relentless work. We survived the effort and had much to celebrate, but it was not without a lot of lessons learned and care that my team and I are committed to bringing to this work.

ODE will focus on three areas: grant consolidation and administration; data and public transparency and internal operations and enhanced district supports.

Today, I want to provide some of the scope and immediate steps my agency will take beginning this month:

1. **Grant Consolidation and Administration** - ODE currently administers 140 state and federal grants. Immediate action will be taken to minimize duplication of effort (including the pieces of information ODE requests and collects from school districts as far as application and reporting processes). This work is all about getting intentional and laser-focused on how we organize our systems internally and:
 - Hired a Deputy Director of Operations (started Monday) who will help lead the following agency efforts:
 - Launch plan to address contract administration and grant execution based on recent audit findings.
 - Execute multi-year grants/contracts or grants/contracts for more than one program



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- Provide partial up-front funding, as allowed by statute (especially helpful to community partners)
 - Immediately engage with other states who have successfully aligned programming. Use lessons learned to shift from individual grant reporting to holistic reporting around the five student success priorities, similar to our sister agency in Louisiana. So that we can,
 - Reduce the number of reports collected by ODE into five coherent narrative reports centered on student success priorities, the process launched this month and should conclude no later than August 2026.
2. **Data and Public Transparency** - Data are the catalyst for improving student outcomes. And, when we collect data at the state level, we want to ensure that:
- 1.) we are using it to better understand context and needs across our state and
 - 2.) we are making data visual and shareable for public consumption.

ODE will modify and refine its data collections and improve its transparency to the public through the following activities:

- Inventory current data collections and determine what efficiencies are feasible by June 30, 2025.
- Engage with school districts, partners, ESDs, CBOs in order to identify what other information should be included on a transparency dashboard. By April 15, 2025
- Increase accountability by publicly posting school districts' data in user-friendly formats, including related to graduation, 9th grade on-track, 3rd grade reading, regular attendance. Launched this spring and we will continue to update and iterate.
- Leverage Oregon's new Online Report Card to help education and community partners answer questions about student outcomes; ensure webpage links to important fiscal information, early literacy curriculum materials, and current and longitudinal state test results.



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3. **Internal Operations and Enhanced District Supports** - ODE currently provides programmatic support to school districts. This focus area seeks to overhaul and align how ODE provides coaching and supports to districts through an aligned continuum of supports. ODE will:
- Contract with a third party entity that specializes in assessment & accountability system design to assure that our process for determining district eligibility for support meets rigorous standards for entry and exit.
 - Contract with a third party to inventory staff work and capacity; restructure and reallocate staff time and capacity to create efficiencies and systematize processes. By June 2025.
 - Develop a plan to refine/renew staff work and responsibilities that aligns with a comprehensive vision and strategy for accelerating student academic outcomes. (Ongoing) Happening now with new DD and cross office prep for accountability.
 - Deploy cross-office “district support teams” to improve efficiency and efficacy of support - including technical assistance, professional learning and development, and coaching. (Ongoing).
 - Host regional workshops and technical assistance to support research-based instructional practices, the importance of implementing high-quality instructional materials, ongoing community engagement, needs assessment, and continuous improvement planning processes. Fall 2025. Based on National partnership. In 2025, Oregon joined CCSSO’s High-Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Development Network (IMPD Network), a national initiative that includes 15 states (such as Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi). The network provides access to national best practices, professional coaching, and peer support, and member states have seen significant growth in the use of high-quality materials (HQIM) and student outcomes.

I’ll close today with recognizing that Oregon’s accountability system is incredibly complex, consisting of a mix of state and federal programs, requirements, and funding streams. The current system has many disparate parts and throughlines rather than a coherent set of systems and processes. The impact of separate programs and requirements result in inefficiencies, duplicative processes and further underscores the need for change by ODE.



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We had to learn the art of being warm demanders. My biggest lesson learned is that you can pursue excellence without demoralizing or demeaning educators and communities in the process. We can find a path in this workgroup to raise the bar - unapologetically - AND do so in a humanizing way. We have a long way to go to improve outcomes for our students. They deserve better. This is our opportunity to answer the call with a framework that is both rigorous and reciprocal. Every Oregonian should see their role in helping our scholars achieve their highest potential.

The work moving forward - and this bill - helps us move toward a cohesive accountability system, one that takes into account all levels of school governance (local, state, federal) as well as input from families and communities will enable us as a state, along with administrative action and change by ODE, to lead with transparency and empower leaders to continue to build capacity for student learning and school improvement.

Intervention or direction of funds is not the intent or primary goal. We are setting our North Star, so we can focus on creating the conditions for students and educators to thrive. This bill helps fill some critical gaps in our accountability system so we have a more coherent approach to measuring, monitoring and supporting student success. If we believe in our scholars let's set a high bar with high support and high expectations.

Thank you,

Dr. Charlene Williams

Director