

Black History

State Legislation Funds Research on Black Student Success

Department of Education plan focuses on closing the achievement gap, improving outcomes

By Arashi Young
Of The Skanner News

There is a new Black student success plan being created by the Oregon Department of Education, community based organizations, teachers and parents.

The landmark plan focuses on closing the achievement gap for African American students – and most importantly, it is funded. Around \$3 million will be used to plan and fund grants for Black student success initiatives.

Markisha Smith, an education equity program specialist with the Oregon Department of Education said this endeavor is a way to bring together the extensive community knowledge of Black students' needs with institutional funding.

"We know works well... we know what works for our kids and it's a matter of putting resources behind that and believing that the traditional way in which we do things is not necessarily the only way that we can do things," Smith said.

The plan and funding come from the Oregon State legislature House Bill 2016 which was signed into law by Governor Kate Brown on July 1, 2015.

It was signed amidst a tense national conversation about race as South Carolina debated the removal of the Confederate flag after the horrific Charleston church shooting committed by Dylann Roof.

The bill directs the Oregon Department of Education to create and implement a statewide education plan for Black students. To this end, ODE has created a Black student success plan advisory group and has hired Education Program Specialist Kendra Hughes to coordinate these efforts.



Ron Herndon, director of Albina Head Start School in Northeast Portland

“There have been studies done for the last 200 years regarding the condition of Black people in this country and most of them end up gathering dust on someone’s shelf. If you took all these reports and stacked them up, it would be higher than the Empire State Building

Smith said the advisory group is consists of a mix of individuals who are dedicated to education; from Pre-K through higher Ed. Advisory group members include community advocates Ron Herndon from Albina Head Start, Tony Hopson with Self Enhancement, Inc., Nkenge Harmon Johnson of the Urban League of Portland and Charles McGee from the Black Parent

Initiative.

Smith said the advisory group has a wealth of insight from working for Black students for many years.

"We've got good folks behind this who are really driving the conversation and making those key recommendations," Smith said. "They are doing that based on research, based on experience; I think that is a game-changer."

A full list of advisory group members can be found here: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/superintendent/priorities/advisory-group-members-for-website.pdf>

The advisory group has been meeting about once a month since October 2015. In April the group will deliver the plan to the legislature and begin the

the group will be looking to fund programs that are evidence-based and results oriented. The funding provides an opportunity to prove to the legislature that backing black education can close the achievement gap.

If the 2016 school year shows good results, the advisory group can make the case for continued investment in black student success.

Ron Herndon, who is a part of the advisory group, said there are a lot of knowledgeable people making recommendations and he believes the end product will be good, but he is concerned the plan wouldn't be enacted.

"The big question is 'What happens with the work when the committee is finished?', there have been studies done

grant proposal process. There will be a request for proposals from education and community based organizations.

Smith said after the grants have been approved the funding will be available for some summer activities and programs that will start in the fall 2016 school year.

Right now, the \$ 3 million investment is for one year of funding. Smith said

for the last 200 years regarding the condition of Black people in this country and most of them end up gathering dust on someone's shelf," Herndon said. "If you took all these reports and stacked them up, it would be higher than the Empire State Building."

Herndon would like to see close mon-

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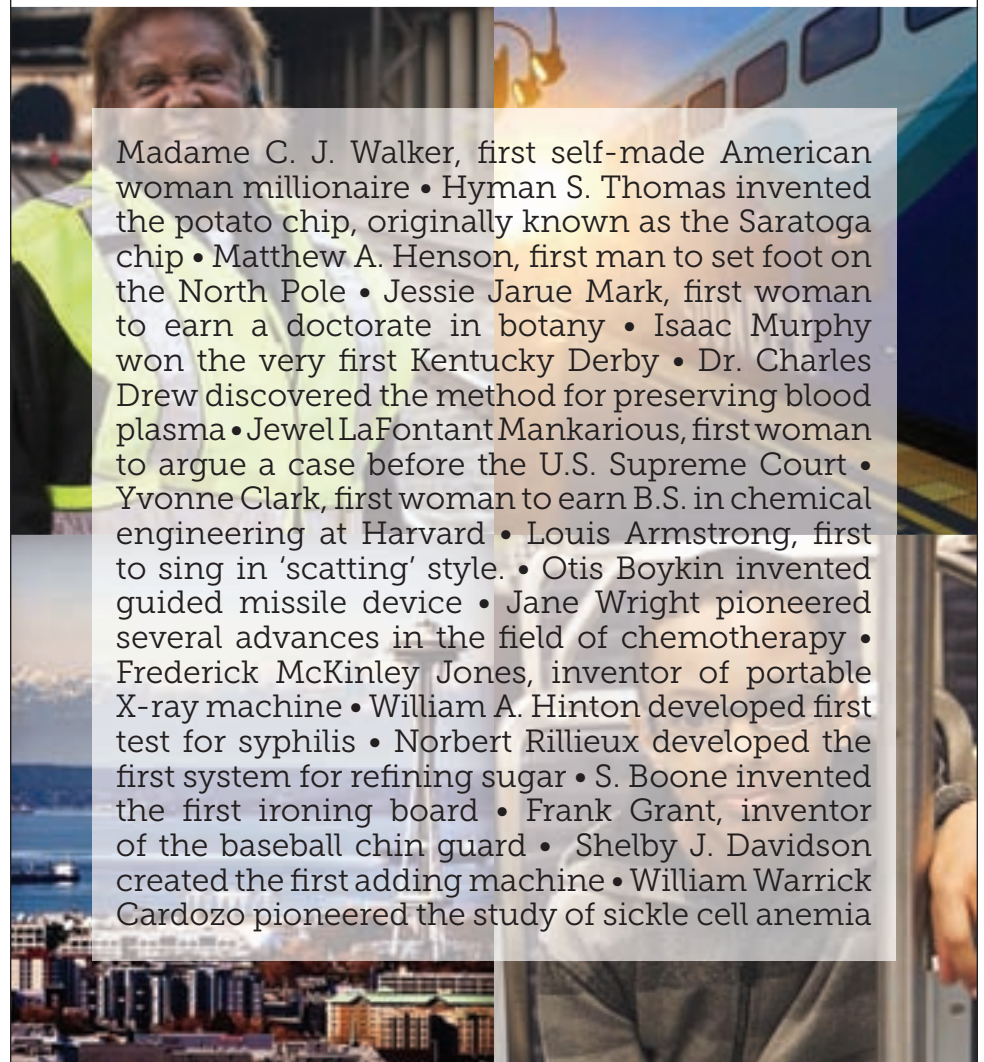
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