



**Testimony of Modesta Minthorn, Education Director
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
Joint Committee on Ways & Means, SubCommittee on Education
SB 13
June 20, 2017**

Good Afternoon Co-Chairs and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to support Senate Bill 13.

Since the 1970s, the Umatilla Tribes have worked to bring our history, language and culture into the surrounding school districts in Eastern Oregon. Despite real challenges over the years, we now have strong relationships with the Pendleton School District and others close by. In fact, last March, Governor Brown visited Pendleton's "Walk to Language" program. She learned to say a few words in the Umatilla language in a program that serves all kindergarten students in the city. It is a historic partnership between our Tribe, the State and the District.

Years ago, we never imagined we would see a Governor practicing our language in a classroom in the Pendleton School District. But now that we know what can be done through collaboration, we are ready to work with the state to build on that progress through SB 13. In fact, earlier this month new signage was unveiled at Washington Elementary in Pendleton that adds Umatilla and Weyiiletpuu translations to the façade and interior.

I think we can all agree it is important to provide curriculum that is historically accurate. Each of the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon are a sovereign - with distinct languages, customs, values, beliefs and independent relationships with the state and federal government. And SB 13 provides an opportunity for each of us to educate Oregonians about who we are as a people. In the Pendleton School District, the brainstorming has already begun to address the scope and sequence of a working curriculum.

But there are other benefits that intersect with your legislative goals to increase graduation rates. Our Tribal Education Department provides services for about 670 Native American students in area school districts. And based on my experience, I believe SB 13 will result in increased academic achievement and graduation rates for those students and their peers.

When the state invests in culturally based education, and provides historically accurate curriculum, Native American students will get reinforcement of their identity. And with that reinforcement, teachers will see enhanced socio-emotional wellbeing. Studies and classroom experience will tell you this positively affects math and reading test scores.

So, in the end, SB 13 will help our Tribe to tell our story using our voice and it will help you to create policy change that some say is needed to increase graduation rates throughout our state. We urge a "do pass" recommendation to your colleagues.