

## PRESS RELEASE

Friday, January 6, 2023

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## Governor-Elect Tina Kotek Announces New Education Policy Staff, New Behavioral Health Director at Oregon Health Authority

Colt Gill, Director of the Oregon Department of Education, to Retire After Legislative Session

[Portland, OR] — Today Governor-Elect Tina Kotek announced two new staff members who will join her administration to lead education policy, a new Behavioral Health Director who will join the Oregon Health Authority, and the upcoming retirement of the leader of Oregon's Department of Education.

**Pooja Bhatt** will serve as the Education Initiative Director, joining the Governor's Policy Initiatives Team alongside **Annaliese Dolph**, Behavioral Health Initiative Director, and **Taylor Smiley Wolfe**, Housing Initiative Director. The Policy Initiatives Team is a new structure within the Governor's Office to focus staff capacity on the three priority issues of shared statewide concern.

In this role, Bhatt will oversee the Governor's focused agenda on improving early learning and K-12 outcomes. Bhatt brings more than 15 years of policy experience to the Governor's Office, most recently serving as the Co-Founder and Managing Partner of SeeChange, a consulting firm that has led policy and program development with numerous state and local education institutions and community-based organizations. Prior to that, Bhatt served as Governor Kate Brown's Education Policy Advisor, helping develop the education budget and priorities for the 2019 legislative session. She also served in various roles at the Multnomah County early learning hub with United Way of Columbia-Willamette and Foundations for a Better Oregon.

**Melissa Goff** will join the administration as the Governor's Education Advisor, providing leadership and support on educational issues, including an expanded focus on supporting early learning and K-12 education related agencies. Goff joins the Governor's Office from the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA), where she was serving as the Deputy Executive Director focused on serving Oregon students through professional growth, legal advice, and legislative advocacy for Oregon school boards. Prior to OSBA, Goff was the Superintendent for Greater Albany Public Schools and the Philomath School District. She has also served as an Assistant Superintendent for Portland Public Schools.

Joining the Oregon Health Authority's leadership team, **Ebony Clarke** will serve as the new Behavioral Health Director. Clarke joins the administration with more than 25 years of experience working in both the publicly funded and non-profit behavioral health arena. She most recently served as the Director of Multnomah County's Health Department, where she led the Health Department's COVID-19 response and monitored a \$440 million budget. Prior to that, Clarke served as the Behavioral Health Director in Multnomah County.

"These talented individuals are ready to dig into the details and form solutions that will deliver results for Oregonians. I'm grateful to have strong leaders joining my team who are ready to take on three of our state's biggest challenges: housing and homelessness, mental health and addiction care, and successful schools," said **Governor-Elect Kotek**.

Additionally, following the upcoming legislative session, **Colt Gill**, Director of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), will retire after serving more than 30 years as an Oregon educator. A national search will be announced to replace Gill's role in the coming months.

Gill was appointed in June 2016 as the Education Innovation Officer at ODE, and then became Director in 2018. He has helped improve graduation outcomes for Oregon students by working collaboratively with local communities, school districts, researchers and students. He led Oregon's schools through the COVID-19 pandemic, and helped conceptualize and start implementation of the Student Success Act, the state's largest investment in Oregon schools.

"Colt Gill earned a reputation as a strong advocate for education equity, helping to make our schools more inclusive for all Oregon students," said **Governor-Elect Kotek**. "I appreciate his many years of public service -- both as an advocate and as a leader in our state government."

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