

Testimony to the Joint Ways and Means Education Subcommittee

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Topic: OEIB Recommendations for Strategic Investments in Education

**By
Tom Olson
Co-founder, Oregon Save Our Schools
tskiis@aol.com**

Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee:

Imagine we are in a hospital emergency room. An ambulance arrives with a greatly disheveled patient with two broken legs—one of which is a compound fracture. The Emergency Room Chief Physician and his team quickly huddle in a private room, out of hearing distance from the patient to diagnose the situation. They decide to first give the patient a haircut and shave, thus nicely fixing part of his disheveled appearance. They think they can make the patient feel a lot better by improving his appearance. The patient asks, “But, Doc, what are we gonna’ do about my two broken legs? I want to be able to walk again.”

This is the situation our state now faces with the Governor’s and Oregon Education Investment Board’s recommended “strategic investments” that are before you for consideration in HB 3232 A. Oregon’s public education system has two broken legs brought on by a decade of disinvestment. For example:

- Oregon’s per student spending has plummeted from 15th in the nation to 37rd.
- K-12 schools’ share of Oregon’s state budget dropped from 44% in 2003-2005 to 39% in 2011-2013.
- Oregon school districts have lost 16% of their workforce over the past three years.
- High school class sizes have increased by 28.6%.
- Elementary class sizes have increased by more than 19%.
- Oregon’s education funding received a grade of “F” in a new Rutgers University national comparative study of states’ level of funding efforts for public education
- And just yesterday we learned that Oregon’s schools will lose \$10 million due to the federal sequestration—with particular impact on serving special education and poor students—the kids who need the most help.

You have been presented with recommendations that literally ignore our education system’s broken legs. After private meetings, the OEIB has decided to shift the focus of treatment to a cosmetic “feel good” haircut and shave. The “investments” before you will do nothing to reduce class sizes; they will do nothing to restore curriculum offerings. They will do nothing to restore

instructional days to a system that has one of the shortest school years in the country. They will do nothing to support serious efforts to deal with poverty's impacts on learning. They will do nothing to restore the 7,000 educators laid off in the past three years. They will do nothing to restore curriculum offerings like art, music, physical education that have been drastically cut. Spending money on these "strategic" investments will, in fact, make our situation worse by spending \$34 million that never reaches our classrooms! And that doesn't include the \$3 million that will be spent on various bureaucrats shepherding and overseeing these unproven experiments.

What these recommendations will do is create greater state bureaucracy, and use valuable dollars to competitively fund some pet projects to a favored few—, with absolutely no evidence that these projects will treat education's broken legs. In fact, these recommendations don't even bring the patient to the emergency room for treatment.

Haircuts and shaves can wait. Begin fixing public education's broken legs; make the core investment decision instead to shift the requested \$34 million to improve basic school funding— before we see our schools' vital sign monitors "flat line"

After two years of OEIB discussions about "investing in education," you would think that the Governor and Board might present you a plan for investments that will begin to eliminate the huge and embarrassing \$3 billion Quality Education Model school funding gap that exists in this state. Or are we just quietly and without fanfare "sun-setting" attention to ten years of high quality research about the necessary level of Oregon quality school funding. Taking a little trip to the barbershop is not going to fix our broken legs

Thank you