

May 3, 2013

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee:

Yesterday I testified asking you to say “no” for now to this particular package on “strategic investments” the Governor has put forward in HB 3232, and take time to really listen to those who are in our classrooms day in and day out and what they know struggling students and all our students need. As I mentioned, I was not against the ideals - many of the programs can serve a good purpose, but we already have scarce dollars and should find other means of funding these. Perhaps the philanthropic institutions that are in favor of these programs could fund them until we have found a way to restore full school days and programming for students. Also, it should be noted that the number one “reform” that has been proven over and over again to increase student achievement is lowering class sizes. Please see this link for research papers on that topic: <http://www.classsizematters.org/research-and-links/> I also ask that you remain aware of how students are losing their engagement and faith in school as they watch year after year of cuts and increasing class sizes and losses to many of the programs, such as languages, music, art, and career and tech courses. Many students are not getting the support they need as our adult to student ratio in our classes is inadequate.

You should also be aware of the history of the “strategic investments” the Governor and his large, well-paid staff have put forward for education. The Governor convened a “private education funding team” that did not include parents, teachers, or students. This group identified ten strategic investments for education. When the public was made aware of these in public forums held last fall, there was great opposition. It wasn't that people were against the ideals, but that as major stakeholders in education – as people in the trenches – in our schools, they have knowledge of what is working or not for students and how we can get more bang for the buck to assist students. School counselors spoke out on the needs students have and how best to meet those – ideas not reflected in the proposal. The Oregon School Librarian of the Year testified about the constant cuts to our school libraries and staff, and how that affects student reading. A number of national experts, such as Dr. Stephen Krashen, have spoken of the need for school libraries and librarians and library media specialists. Here are a few resources related to that topic: <http://www.lrs.org/data-tools/school-libraries/impact-studies/> Parents and others at the forum testified that spending millions on “regional achievement centers” and “statewide longitudinal databases” was just out of touch with the fiscal realities of our schools, and what we as taxpayers and those closest to students know is needed. Here is a video from a parent in Beaverton speaking on this issue: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqXfbQQjWii> Here is a teacher's perspective, too: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjtXbn0PrbU>. I will also mention that Joanne Yatvin, a nationally recognized educator and administrator from the National Reading Panel and National Council of Teachers of English prepared this brief critique of the reading initiatives proposed in the Governor's plan: <http://oregonsaveourschools.blogspot.com/2012/12/oregon-reads-left-to-chance-and.html> I am grateful that the Co-Chairs budget has not included the regional achievement centers, but you should be familiar with the fact that people were not happy with the list of ten proposed investments.

I am also concerned that many of the programs described in these “strategic investments” are grant based opportunities. Applying for grants takes time and money from our schools. The FTE needed to apply for grants could be better spent on directly serving students.

I mentioned yesterday an exchange I had with Professor Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford. I had contacted her after I saw the Governor's proposed budget for education and saw that it still included

things such as the regional achievement centers, despite the public opposition. I was told by one of the Governor's education advisors on staff that these centers were Dr. Darling-Hammond's idea. When I sent my inquiry, Dr. Darling-Hammond replied that the state's description of these centers was not at all what she had recommended at that the recommendations she DID have she expected could only be considered sometime in the future if more funding is available. She expressed her concerns as well for the cuts to school funding and called it "criminal." I had initially cut and pasted these email conversations into the body of this letter, but perhaps it is more appropriate that I just forward them to you directly. I will do that.

I share this so that you can see the reference to the realization that even good reforms require more money which we may not have for a while, and also that the plans set out from the OEIB don't even match what their expert had recommended in this instance. Why is that? Additionally, I noted in my verbal testimony yesterday an excerpt from a book entitled: *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance* edited by Prudence L. Carter and Kevin G. Welner (2013). I read from a section on funding equitable education. It noted how over a decade ago Massachusetts had made made significant improvements in closing educational gaps through what you might call "strategic investments" but they did this with an infusion of \$ 2 billion in new state dollars for its public schools (p. 96). That is not the situation we are in right now in Oregon. I would love it, if it were!

I appreciated the discussion by Whitney Grubbs of having more project based learning for STEM subjects, but once again, we need to focus on the reality in our classrooms. Right now, many of our schools don't even have the most basic essentials to do science, such as hot plates, sinks, or basic instruments. Additionally, with the large class sizes many of our schools are facing, the hands-on science becomes much more difficult. In our Title I schools, where the focus has been on raising test scores, teachers that want to do more project based learning, have been forced to do more test prep to raise test scores. We need to think holistically about the quality of education students are receiving and how all pieces fit together as we develop our budgets.

I am also concerned that having new "model" STEM lab schools means that these resources for STEM education are to just serve some students, and not all. There are many things we can do to enhance education for all, rather than further segregate our schools.

As you had people praise the proposed STEM initiatives, I am including in this written testimony the research I had mentioned yesterday about where we are actually losing students in the STEM pipeline. If we are saying that the proposed investments will help with the gap in the STEM pipeline, then we need to really look at where the gap is and why it exists. You can find this research by Rutgers in these documents:

[Lowell, L., & Salzman, H. . \(2007\). Into the eye of the storm: Assessing the evidence on science and engineering education, quality, and workforce demand. The Urban Institute, \(October 2007\).](#) The Conclusion and Policy Recommendations are found on page 40. This notes that policy decisions are being made on misperceptions of the labor pool, economic prosperity, and sound strategies. In fact, much of the data on the labor pool is inaccurate and problems in STEM hiring are related to off-shoring and policies that lead to hiring lower wage workers (i.e. H1B visas). There is always more we can and should be doing for struggling students, under-represented students, and all our students, but the solution must address the problem.

The same researchers did a follow-up study based don their findings from above:

Lowell, B.L., Salzman, H., Bernstein, H., & Henderson, E. (2009). Steady as she goes? Three generations of students through the science and engineering pipeline . Proceedings of the Annual meetings of the association for public policy analysis and manag Page 36 notes: “This analysis does strongly suggest that students are not leaving STEM pathways because of lack of preparation or ability. Instead, it does suggest that we turn our attention to factors other than educational preparation or student ability in this compositional shift to lower-performing students in the STEM pipeline.”

The bottom line is that decisions need to be based on research and evidence and by listening to the professionals and those closest to students – parents, teachers, and even the students themselves. That has not happened with the development of the proposed strategic investments. Again, some of the ideas are good, especially if you separate them from the overall context of our education system and reality, but that is not possible. The education reforms that have developed over the course of the past few years remind me of a book I recently read with my ten year old daughter. It was about children of the scientists and engineers who developed the first nuclear bomb detonated in 1945. Of the more than 130,000 people working on the project, only about 12 total knew the overall picture and the rest were like “moles in the dark” working on their own aspect, not knowing or seeing the ultimate picture. These people were excited by their own project, unaware of how it fit into a larger plan. Before we pass more education reforms or pull more resources away from our already scarce education funding, let's have a meaningful look at the overall picture we are ultimately aiming for, and make sure all the parts fit together into a productive, meaningful whole.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Susan Barrett
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