



Oregon School Employees Association

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Testimony before the Joint Subcommittee on Education on Senate Bill 5519

Submitted by Tim Stoelb, president of the Oregon School Employees Association

Co-chairs, members of the committee, on behalf of the 20,000 members of the Oregon School Employees Association, I am pleased that the recently released co-chair budget proposes a \$6.75 billion allocation for K-12 schools.

The majority of our members are classified support personnel who have been dramatically affected over the past 11 years by back-to-back economic recessions. Work hours have been reduced (for many, below the threshold for health insurance benefits); wages have declined and stagnated; work days have been eliminated; and there's less staff to educate Oregon's students. Our data shows that more than 1,500 classified positions have been lost during this period. However, through the eyes of our members, what hurts the most is being unable to provide the educational opportunity students enjoyed before these two recessions.

The \$6.75 billion allocation is a big step forward for the state in its effort to provide a world-class education for its students. This level of funding could bring back not only teachers but also educational assistants who can provide one-on-one and small-group instruction to students. It could bring back library/media assistants who can teach students the value of reading and about the many uses of our school district libraries. It could bring back technology specialists who are critical to expanding curriculum offerings to students in a cost-efficient manner.

The state funding level also affects the safety and health of students and staff. In districts throughout the state, voters have passed much-needed local bond levies to repair and build new schools. Yet the lack of funding to hire an adequate number of custodians and maintenance personnel places the taxpayers' investments at risk by not maximizing the longevity of new buildings or repairs to existing facilities. The co-chair budget may help change this fact.

Additionally, this higher level of funding may result in districts thinking twice before selling off ("contracting out") services they provide — such as student transportation and nutrition services — for one-time revenue savings, especially when studies show that privatization costs more over the long term.

OSEA supports the \$6.75 billion budget proposal for our K-12 schools and will work hard to make it a reality. We may have some disagreements as to how the \$6.75 billion is funded, but there is no disagreement that the revenue would once again place Oregon on track to providing our students a quality education. Thank you,