



Date: March 10, 2015
To: Education Subcommittee of Joint Ways and Means,
Co-chairs Komp and Monroe and members
From: Hanna Vaandering, President, Oregon Education Association
RE: *HB 5017 and HB 5016 [K-12 Funding and ODE Budget]*

Representing OEA's 42,000 members, I am here today to ask that the 2015 Legislature fund our public education system with an eye toward investing in the schools our students deserve.

You will hear from educators, parents, board members, and others about the years of cuts our students have suffered during and after the Great Recession. You will hear that though our economy has begun to turn around, our schools have a long way to go to restore the programs cut during those years. Our members hope you will find a way to think beyond crisis-level funding and instead, help us build out of this historically low investment trough. At the very least, we are asking that you help our schools maintain the levels of services and staffing that they received in the current biennium. Additionally, it is our vision that every five-year-old child will have access to a full day of Kindergarten. To achieve these objectives in 2015-2017, the State School Fund must be **at least** \$7.5 billion. We are also asking that the budget for the Department of Education include sufficient resources to help our students with the greatest struggles – struggles that are barriers to learning.

When we read the headlines, we see that Oregon schools have earned some dubious distinctions – in terms of class size, attendance, instructional hours, and graduation rate comparisons with other states. We know what it will take to successfully address these challenges: enough resources to bring down our teacher-student ratios, to lengthen the school year, and to fund extra supports for struggling learners, such as summer school and other interventions. The co-chairs' framework budget, unfortunately, does not achieve these objectives.

While we understand that the key to a no-cuts budget is sufficient state resources, we also understand that this Legislature has the ability to make choices about how to deploy existing revenues. Before we create new programs or fund targeted initiatives, we believe it is essential that the State School Fund be fully funded first. Making "strategic investments" that ignore chronic statewide base funding is like icing a cake that has not been fully baked. Those funds would better be used to bolster the SSF base budget, to ensure that our schools do not have to build budgets this spring that make cuts to hours, classes, staffing, and student supports.

We hope that each of you has received and displayed this year's coalition funding poster, "Our Children and their Schools". Many of you will also receive district-level local posters, reflecting what the different budget levels will mean in your own school districts. This tool is designed to give you a very specific glimpse of the status of districts, considering the unique composition of each and accounting for differences such as bonding

status, reserves, local options, declining enrollment, unique circumstances, and other variables that impact them. Additionally, these tools will help you understand how much is actually distributed, after all the so-called “carve-outs” are taken off the top of the total SSF appropriation. These are the factors that explain the difference between the state estimate of “current service level” and the actual CSL as districts experience it. The \$265 million difference also includes extending full-day Kindergarten statewide.

As for the ODE’s operations/grant-in-aid budget, the co-chairs of Ways and Means said it well in their budget framework: “We are still not where we need to be. We are still far short of being able to make game-changing investments in education, and to significantly boost opportunities for Oregon families.” Many of those families are in or near poverty – an issue OEA members care about deeply, as they see the ramifications every day in their classrooms. That’s why, in addition to making a pitch for better school funding, we also urge this committee to adopt the ODE’s Policy Option Package 148, which would fund both HB 2545 and HB 2846, nutrition bills aimed at feeding our students who need it. Research demonstrates that students who are adequately fed are better able to learn. More than 30,000 children in Oregon need nutritious, school-based meals to maintain their long-term health and to optimize their ability to be successful in our classrooms. Just \$2.39 million will draw a \$5.1 million federal match and enable Oregon to expand the program to serve more students.

The so-called “Breakfast after the Bell” bill, also contained in this option package, will allow students to eat breakfast even while they are learning, which will increase participation rates by as much as 40 percent, according to ODE. Just \$192,000 will enable more students to participate and will return more than \$7 million in increased federal funds.

You may wonder why our members are focused on these line-items. The answer is that poverty and near-poverty undermine our students’ ability to focus and achieve. Our current climate, intent as it is to ensure that 100 percent of our kids are academically successful, demands that we consider not only what we put into their heads, but also, what we put into their stomachs. Our children’s healthy futures depends on their health today.

Thank you so much for considering our thoughts and for your work grappling with the competing priorities for limited resources.