



Oregon School Employees Association

www.osea.org

State Office: 4735 Liberty Rd S, Salem, OR 97302-5036

P: 800/252-6732, 503/588-0121 F: 503/588-8307

Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

HB 5016 and HB 5017

March 11, 2015

Good morning Chairs and Members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education. My name is Tricia Smith, and I am speaking for the 20,000 classified educators who are represented by the Oregon School Employees Association.

OSEA members work in almost every level of public education including Head Start programs, K12 school districts, ESDs and community colleges. They are the first to greet our students each day, and the last to say goodbye. They keep them safe, nourished and moving forward; and they are the educators who spend every day teaching our most vulnerable students.

Those of you who have served on this committee for some time suffered with us as our schools endured devastating cuts from the economic recession. You know those cuts came after two decades of near constant decline in funding. Thousands of educators were lost, schools were shuttered forever, and students were left to struggle with what was left.

We are now at nearly the bottom of the states in support for education as a percentage of state taxable resources. Is it really any wonder that our students don't have access to the programs and supports they need to advance, that our school year is so short, or that our class sizes are so large?

The question today is not how did we get to this place of lost programs and dreams. The question today is will we choose to stay here? Will we make it worse? Or will we finally begin to rebuild education so that we can deliver on the promise we make to our students every day to give them what they need to succeed? I am here today to ask you to make good on that promise and set us back on the path toward the high quality schools we all envision for our students.

For our earliest learners, OSEA supports the proposed funding increase in the ODE Grant-In-Aid budget at the Governor's recommended level. Oregon's Prekindergarten and EI/ECSE programs are not only essential expansions of federal programs; they are critical investments that multiply savings through every level of education and our society as a whole. These small investments before kindergarten will mean hundreds of millions more in savings that would otherwise be spent mitigating problems later.

However, we ask you to reject the Co-Chairs budget framework amount for K12 education of \$7.235 billion because it is unthinkable to us that the legislature would again cut funding to our schools when the economy does not require such drastic action. A State School Fund appropriation at this level does not provide sufficient funding to continue programs at their current levels, nor does it fund full day kindergarten, estimated by LFO to cost an additional \$286 million.

You have heard others tell you that an appropriation to the State School Fund of \$7.5 billion would prevent further cuts, allowing us to implement full day kindergarten and tread water in the rest of our programs. Now that the economy has recovered but our students still suffer with a short school year, large class sizes and a lack of programs and staff to support them, we suggest to you that treading water is unacceptable.

OSEA members ask that you invest again in our students and our schools by appropriating a minimum of \$7.875 billion to the State School Fund. With this investment we can begin to increase instructional time, reduce class sizes and provide the programs and supports our vulnerable students need to succeed.

We also ask that you provide funding for the school nutrition bills, HB 2545 and HB 2846. These bills will provide nutritious meals to thousands of students who might otherwise go hungry throughout their school day. With less than \$3 million in state investment, we will leverage more than \$12 million in federal match for the programs.

And finally we ask that you avoid funding any new 'carve out' programs, which take money off the top of the State School Fund and diminish the amount sent to all schools and all students. The most important thing we can provide to our students today is adequate staffing of our schools and a full school year. These 'carve out' programs, which seem to multiply with each new budget, take critically needed funding from basic education, thus increasing class size and decreasing instructional time for students.

We understand that this committee is restrained in its authority to act by the priorities set by the leadership and in other committees. However, you are the eyes and ears of the legislature when it comes to school funding, and we implore you to take the messages you've heard back to your leadership and your caucuses. Please tell them you won't vote to cut education yet again, and the resources must be found to begin to rebuild our schools. Our students can't wait another day.

