

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee  
Dr. Rex Hagans  
June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Chair Roblan, Vice Chair Knopp, and members of the Committee

My name is Rex Hagans. I live in the Canby School District and I am a founding member of Oregon Save Our Schools. We are a group of volunteers - concerned parents, grandparents, teachers, students, and community members founded in 2011. We have no financial backers or interests. We are fighting for:

- An excellent, well-rounded, and engaging education for all of Oregon's public school students.
- An end to high-stakes testing used for student, teacher, or school evaluation.
- Teacher, family, and community input that informs public education policy.
- Equitable and well-funded schools that support students and classrooms first.
- An end to corporate education models and top-down government mandates which threaten a strong, democratic, public education system.

Let me begin by thanking Senator Roblan for creating and guiding this work group. His inclusionary approach stands in stark contrast to the sorry history of the so-called reform created by our ex-governor and literally jammed down the throats of not only those who teach and lead our schools, but also the legislature.

I personally attended most of the meetings of the OEIB and its predecessor group, the Oregon Investment Team. This process was shameful. Structures were created without plans; Disagreement and dissent was suppressed in a manner I would never have believed to be possible in Oregon. There was celebration of the virtues of "disruptive innovation"; Public input was a joke, and what was sought in a series of public forums was then ignored because it rejected the ideas being pushed by OEIB.

The result of this folly is a still seriously under funded system with its governance and a decision making process now muddled and ineffective.

While I applaud the changes made in this bill by the SB215 work group, especially the elimination of the OEIB Board, I also believe they are only a good start, and not nearly sufficient to the real need, which is to restore effective local control to our schools – parents, teachers and local school boards actually do know their own children and what is best for them. Under the leadership of our ethically challenged ex-Governor, Oregon has not only been a willing participant in a massive national movement toward top down and privatized control of public education, but a recognized leader. That needs to stop here and stop now.

We cannot simply change the sign on the door but leave the merchandise in the shop and the Kitzhaber appointed sales force in place and think everything will be fine.

So I believe the overall thrust of the work yet to done must be to further reduce the amount of centralized control within the bureaucracy and return it to the parents and teachers at the local level – and to their representatives here in legislature.

Beyond that here are my top priorities:

**Establishing, clear, visible leadership for the Education Enterprise – other than simply the Governor**

It is my belief that Oregon should return to an elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction. If there has ever been a more clear demonstration of the pitfalls of concentrating all power in the hands of one person than what we have just seen, I have certainly missed it. The strong tendency toward cronyism and the failure to properly vet ideas with teachers and parents has never been more obvious. Oregon should run, not walk, away from that model.

### **Closely Examining the Need for and Functioning of Each component of the Current OEIB Structure**

The management and use of the longitudinal database tops my list here. I believe that it has been the root cause of atrocious over testing and the means by which Pearson, the “Monstanto” of Education and the parent of the infamous “SBAC” test has begun to control the lives of our students and teachers. Plunging ahead with the mass administration of the SBAC has been advocated and led by OEIB staff and efforts to protect the privacy of student information have been resisted by leaders of within the Department of Education. We need leadership that will fight to maintain privacy and also to drastically reduce the amount of testing. The SBAC must go, and be replaced by assessment of instruction by the teachers who are delivering it. Data must become the servant of the teachers and not a club to be held over their heads.

### **Dramatically increasing ways for the schools to partner with Community and Human Service Agencies to fight poverty.**

Poverty is easily the greatest impediment to the intellectual and personal growth of our students. Yet we were nearly a full year into the current reform movement before we even began to hear that statement. It was perceived as an “excuse” for teachers whose performance was being cast into doubt. This is insulting to teachers and detrimental to our children. We need to fully recognize this threat and not count on developing “World Class Teachers” as the solution. Oregon’s teachers are “World Class” but they need the full support of the community and the funding necessary to address this challenge. We should seek much stronger partnerships with our friends in the Social Services and recognize that state investment in such programs as TANF has direct impact on the school performance on thousands of the students in our classrooms.

### **Determining whether or not a “Chief Education Office” really contributes anything significant enough to justify its existence and the possible continued “muddling” of the decision making process.**

I have great respect for Nancy Golden, as do a great many people in this room and in this state. I also believe Nancy’s considerable capabilities should have nothing to with answering this question. At present, I believe there are at least a dozen people on her staff. If this Office is to shift away from managing programs to more of a planning and coordinating emphasis, that staffing level certainly seems excessive. And I have grown to be quite skeptical of designating “coordinators.” I believe the old joke that a coordinator is someone who sits between two facilitators is amusing precisely because there is a considerable grain of truth in it. For me the jury is still out on this question.

### **Promoting Straight Talk and Plain Language in Our Policies**

Equity in our educational system is critically important, and an area where improvement is an absolute must. But I have to wonder just how many of our citizens are impressed and motivated to action by goal statements such as “implementation of the equity lens?” The work of the OEIB has, in my opinion, been riddled with arcane language from the very beginning. I firmly believe this is the mark of an organization struggling with understanding exactly what its purpose really is. Going forward we should strive to avoid this. I recommend the “Mother Test.” If your mother has to ask you what a term means, it probably should not be used.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my opinions and biases. I look forward to continuing to participate in the work group.