

March 21, 2017

Dear Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Committee On Education:

Thank you for allowing me to share my experience and thoughts on SB 803. My name is Todd Miller, Superintendent of Santiam Canyon School District, a rural district east of the Salem area. I have been waiting for years for a bill like this to come along. This simple bill could fix a fundamental problem in Oregon education, maximizing tax dollars and improving student outcomes.

**THE PROBLEM:**

The current proposed education budget is an issue that needs to be addressed first in the state of Oregon. All students deserve a top-notch education. This biennium is the most important two years for our current students, as they only get one shot at this. Unstable funds have left our schools in a vicious cycle of fall behind and then try to catch up, just to fall behind again. Unstable inputs lead to unstable outputs. We cannot afford this for our future.

Currently, we are also in an ever-changing cycle of grants and priorities from the state. This unstable system does not allow schools enough time to sustain the granted innovation, or flexibility to meet the differing needs of each school district. Even with the current Measure 98 funds, districts are struggling with the idea of using funds to start a new program, knowing that recent history has taught us that these funds will be gone soon. Also, some districts have already invested heavily in their high schools and CTE programs, leaving them in a difficult spot with this inflexible fund, know they have other needs to address.

The current system of chasing the newest grant trends is not supporting our unique student needs, it leaves inconsistent programs over time, it does not maximize

valuable taxpayer dollars, and is not getting us the student outcomes we want in this state.

#### THE SOLUTION:

Once we have a stable education budget that allows us to operate our schools in a sufficient manner, innovation grant opportunities such as SB 803 become the answer all school districts could benefit from. This is achieved by these three basic principles:

1. **Flexibility:** Each School District is unique with differing student needs. SB 803 allows districts to assess current successes and local data, and use these funds to fill gaps and improve instruction. Local student data and needs should drive our system, not vice versa.
2. **Consistency:** As districts' needs change, so could these funds. Building successful programs takes time and commitment. The best teachers want to work in positions that are steady, growing and supported. This innovation fund supports districts to continue programs through biennium budgets, if the need still exists. Personally, I know this consistency will comfort me enough to extend these dollars further into new programs, knowing it will be there for some time. Real change can occur when there is consistency.
3. **Accountability:** SB 803 already has state-wide support systems in place. The Oregon Department of Education has financial and educational grant requirement processes in place to ensure the proper use of the funds. Our current audit process could take care of the financial oversight. Similarly, the work of the Chief Education Office could help foster innovative ideas and research, build collaborative systems and support school improvement efforts. SB 803 ties all these systems together into a single process that meets the unique needs of the students within each district.

We all agree that supporting CTE is important. We are agree supporting Pre-K opportunities are important. We all agree that schools should offer a wide-range of interventions for students. Instead of chasing a new program each biennium, allow districts the opportunity to select the program that meets their unique needs and support it over time. SB 803 can do this. This investment in our students would support stronger district programs and better student outcomes, another thing we can all agree upon.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have additional questions, please feel free to reach out to me. I am happy to assist.

Sincerely,

Todd Miller  
Superintendent  
Santiam Canyon School District