

April 16, 2021

TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means

FR: Superintendent Mark Witty, Baker School District

RE: K-12 State School Fund Budget Request - \$9.6 Billion

Good afternoon Co-Chairs Johnson, Rayfield, Steiner-Hayward, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Mark Witty, I'm the Superintendent of the Baker School District, and I have been an educator in Oregon for over 35 years. Our School District, one of the largest organizations in Baker County, has cultivated relationships with over 30 local partners to support birth-to-career education, develop community solutions for childcare, summer camps, and workforce development programs.

I'm here to speak about the critical importance of increasing the State School Fund budget to \$9.6 billion to ensure that every school district and ESD in Oregon has the resources to meet the complex needs of students recovering from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has created economic hardships for many in our community who are agricultural and blue collar workers without the luxury of working from home. It has also created academic hardships despite our best efforts, and has left a long-term imprint on the lives of our students that will require a much higher investment in serving their social and emotional needs for years to come.

I want to thank the Legislature for passage of the Student Success Act and the historic equity-focused investments in our students. In Baker SD, SSA funds enabled the revitalization of an older elementary school to serve as the Baker Early Learning Center. The BELC is a central location where multiple partners have come together to provide services to our youngest families, including badly needed additional preschool and daycare resources coming this next Fall. These early learning supports will assist families in entering and remaining in the workforce while their children are provided with strong programs at a critical point in their development.

The impact of these targeted, equity-focused investments will be diminished and our ability to meet the needs of our students will be jeopardized if you approve a \$9.1 billion State School Fund and we have to cut core services. In Baker SD, \$9.1 billion is \$2.27 million short of maintaining current services and programs. A \$2.27 million deficit is the equivalent of 25 teaching positions or cutting 21 school days from our school calendar.

Our resources are not interchangeable, and the State School Fund is the primary source of funding for our districts. After a year of severe hardship brought on by the current pandemic, I urge you to support our students with a \$9.6 billion State School Fund investment in core services. Thank you for your time.