



Oregon
Tina Kotek, Governor



OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Oregon achieves . . . together!

Colt Gill

Director of the Department of Education

SB 276: Vision Screening
Senate Education Committee
January 30, 2023

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the committee, I am Zoe Larmer, Government Relations Director for the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on Senate Bill 276 regarding vision screenings for students. Currently, ODE has no position on this bill.

Current Law

Oregon requires that education providers collect vision screening certificates from students who are seven years of age or younger and are beginning an educational program with the education provider for the first time. Students over age 7 are not required by law to submit vision screenings certificates.

In the 2021-2023 biennium, the Legislature provided \$1.5 million funding for the 2021-2023 biennium to reimburse educational providers or ODE approved vision screening programs for expenses incurred (\$3.20 per student) in conducting to provide vision screenings for priority populations. Vision screenings can be conducted by school nurses, trained school staff, or by an ODE-approved vision screening provider.

What the Bill Does

SB 276 increases the reimbursement rate from \$3.20 per screening to \$4.00 per screening. SB 276 also increases the appropriation from \$1,500,000 to \$2,000,000 for the biennium beginning in 2023.

By requiring and then reimbursing vision screening for all students aged 7 years or younger, SB 276 will continue to provide vision screenings to students who may not have access to vision screenings elsewhere.

Additional Considerations

During the first year of the current biennium, 177,056 youth received vision screenings for a total reimbursement of \$566,579.60. The vision screening reimbursement grant account currently has a balance of \$2,649,546.80. This is a result of underuse of the available funds over the last two biennium. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the number of students screened during the 2021-21



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor



OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Oregon achieves . . . together!

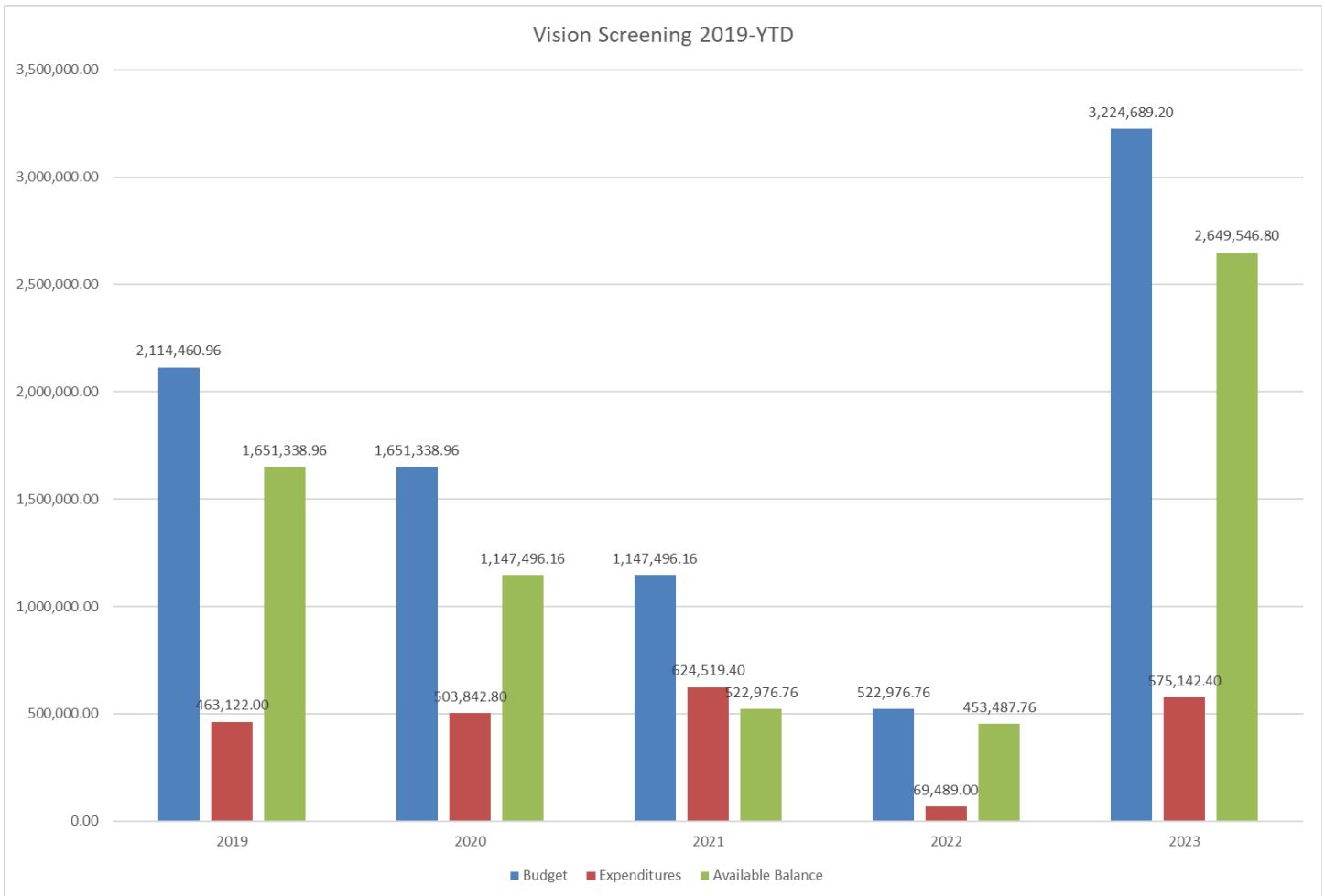
Colt Gill

Director of the Department of Education

and 2021-22 school years. It is anticipated that the fund will have over \$2,000,000 to start the 2023-24 biennium.

| School Year | Number of students screened |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| 2017-18 | 215,694 |
| 2018-19 | 194,800 |
| 2019-20 | 195,162 |
| 2020-21 | 15,671* |
| 2021-22 | 180,155 |

*Reduced numbers in 2020-21 due to COVID pandemic



Given the current state of the vision screening reimbursement grant account, there are a few potential changes that may expand usage of this grant.

First, the current definition of what students are eligible for vision screenings exclude a large population of children ages 0-5. One idea may be to expand the current definition of “education provider” under ORS 336.211 to include a wider variety of early childhood programs (for example Preschool Promise, tuition based preschools.)



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor



OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Oregon achieves . . . together!

Colt Gill

Director of the Department of Education

Next, ORS 336.211 requires the State Board of Education to adopt rules that establish the process for providing reimbursements, including a prioritization if the total amount available exceeds the total amount requested.

This provision requires that ODE wait until all screening reimbursement requests are received prior to reimbursing school districts and vision screening programs. This significantly delays reimbursements to school districts often past the time that they complete their year end accounting. Because of this delay, districts have declined their reimbursement in the past as it isn't cost effective for them to reopen their prior fiscal year to account for the late reimbursement. This funding can be used for important education programming, but only if districts can receive it in a timely manner.

One solution would be to remove the language in the statute that prioritizes populations of students, allowing reimbursements to occur closer to their request date. Another idea would be to allow ODE to provide a grant to a third party to complete vision screenings in addition to allowing reimbursement to school districts. This would increase administrative efficiency and allow ODE to require a grantee to prioritize screenings to underserved communities. We anticipate these changes would allow for greater utilization of the funding provided by the Legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments, and we welcome any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Zoe Larmer

Government Relations Director