



Oregon School Employees Association

www.osea.org

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April 8, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Sen. Elizabeth Steiner
Rep. Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Sarah Wofford and I am the state president of Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA). My background is as a classified accounting specialist at Rogue Community College in Grants Pass, and as the parent of a graduating Oregon public school senior with special needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of key investments to build a better Oregon for all workers and working families.

Right now, Oregon's core public services are moving beyond COVID closures to a better future. Meanwhile, the remaining federal COVID relief funds spend down – and for our members, this feels like a world class ocean swim against an outgoing tide.

As I share perspectives with state leaders who represent healthcare services and social support, I see many points of intersectionality. We are breathing life into programs that provide culturally informed, critical services for all Oregonians – people who live and lead in all 36 Oregon counties - including our most economically fragile and geographically isolated neighbors. We all are experiencing the reality that Oregon's students and families need more social, emotional, behavioral, and academic support than they ever have.

OSEA represents about 23,000 workers in nearly all levels of public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, ESDs, community colleges and special districts. OSEA members perform many of the essential tasks that keep Oregon public schools safe and functional for students, administrators, and teachers.

In a typical elementary school day, the ratio of classified public education staff to licensed staff is roughly seven to one and, as the most diverse component of the K-12 workforce, we more closely reflect the students they support.

As Oregon has suffered through 30 years of disinvestment in public schools and an incredibly promising Student Success Act whose impact was painfully undercut by the pandemic, our student population has increased in size, in diversity and in the number and

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the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the AFL-CIO.*



severity of needs that our students bring with them every day. This has been most clear since the pandemic helped to highlight the serious challenges our schools face, but OSEA members have seen it worsen over the last 20 to 30 years of supporting Oregon students.

While we appreciate the Co-Chairs of Ways and Means recommending a \$9.9 billion dollar budget for K-12, the need is clearly at \$10.3 billion. We simply must do more for Oregon's students, because they need more from us to support their social, emotional, behavioral, physical, and academic health.

Oregon's classified employees are here and ready – to help throughout the lives of our students. People accept and stay in these jobs because they care about kids, and they want not only those individual students to be successful, but for *Oregon* to be successful. To make sure we are on a successful path together, we need:

1. A \$10.3 billion appropriation for the SSF this session, and
2. Meaningful investments in the education workforce – including:
 - Higher quality jobs that have Just Cause in the employment agreement,
 - Funding for recruitment and retention of classified employees to have five-hour minimum workdays or at least a 20% SPED differential,
 - Funding for the currently required de-escalation training and incident reports for classified staff who support special education students,
 - Funding for culturally appropriate early childhood literacy

Oregon students deserve a \$10.3 billion budget for the State School Fund. It is the cost of funding the educators we need to support all of Oregon's students. This means both those already in school and those who will return as the state supports housing and mental and behavioral health and individual school districts reduce absenteeism. The SSF is the essential, core funding for all our public-school districts. It funds the *essential* work of Oregon public education, what classified employees are doing for Oregon students every day. We are trying to support all of Oregon's students.

Oregon students also deserve us funding more than just what's essential. I think we could easily agree that we need to do more than what can do right now for many of Oregon students. What we're doing now – although there are innovative and successful efforts of various kinds in key school districts – is not the goal or the finish line. This is just where Oregon education is at as we climb towards the quality Oregon schools that parents and guardians expect, and all our kids deserve.



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Investing in public education, with an eye toward investment in our full education workforce, is what Oregon needs to lift our kids and their families. Education is a vital priority that requires consistent investment along with investments in housing and behavioral health - because all these issues intersect and, if funded in concert, will mutually support Oregon's students and their families. Committing \$10.3 billion to the SSF gives public education a steady platform from which to launch. Combined with the additional investments by this committee in our education workforce, these core budget elements will help ensure that we can really lift Oregon's students and families.

As the professional classified workforce who have been implementing the state's directives for over 85 years, we are the first in and last out of schools and ESD's across the state, we know and feel how challenging this time in Oregon's history. But we stand with you - to do the absolute best for all of Oregon's students - as together, we support lifetime learning and a brighter future for all Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration and attention,

Sarah Wofford
President
Oregon School Employees Association

