

Submitter: Zachary Cravens
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5516

My name is Zach Cravens, and I am a father of a fourth grader in Portland. I am writing to urge you to take action on critical education funding priorities that directly impact our students, teachers, and communities.

Oregon has not met recommended public education funding levels since 2011, and with each underfunded biennium, state test scores have declined. Adjusted for cost of living, Oregon ranks 31st in the nation for per-student funding, spending \$1,700 less per student than states like Louisiana and West Virginia. To address this, we must modernize the Quality Education Model (QEM) with a full State School Fund investment of \$12.7 billion, plus an \$823 million Student Success Act Transfer, totaling \$13.5 billion.

Additionally, I urge you to fully fund new mandates, including summer unemployment benefits for school-year workers, Paid Leave Oregon, Talented and Gifted programs, and the new financial literacy curriculum. Special education funding must also be addressed by removing the 11% cap on weighted funding and increasing the High Cost Disability Fund to meet the needs of students requiring intensive support.

The impact of under-funding is already being felt in my community. Portland Public Schools face a projected \$40 million deficit for 2025-2026, forcing painful budget cuts at my daughter's elementary school. Staff positions are being eliminated, and classroom configurations may be altered, including the loss of a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher, resulting in a blended fourth/fifth-grade classroom. This is an unacceptable reality in a state that claims to prioritize equitable public education.

Every student deserves access to high-quality education, and our teachers need the resources to provide it. I respectfully urge you to support these funding priorities so that our children—and our community—receive the investment they deserve.

Thank you for your commitment to our education system.