

Submitter: William Fritz  
On Behalf Of: Knappa School District  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

I am the Superintendent of the Knappa School District, located 12 miles east of Astoria along the Columbia River. We are a rural school district serving about 410 students in grades PK through 12. I would like to thank the Committee for the currently proposed \$11.4 billion State School Fund (SSF) allocation, which more closely reflects "current service level" for our state's schools. Even at that level, however, many school districts, like our own, will need to build cuts into our budgets. This is due to the increasing costs of labor and purchased items. For example, insurance is increasing 18% for the upcoming year. The increase in the cost of utilities is also well above the general rate of inflation. Our initial budget estimates are that we will need to cut the equivalent of two teachers (we only employ 31 teachers) from our school system to make the budget work at the proposed SSF number. This is on top of the three teachers we reduced for the 2024-25 school year. Please do your best to enhance the current baseline allocation to get closer to the Quality Education Commission recommendation of \$13.5 billion. I know that there is interest in increased "accountability" for schools, which many of us welcome. That said, sufficient accountability is not the primary problem with our schools...a starved budget is.

We also ask you to eliminate the 11% cap on special education funding. Based on this cap, our district finds itself short approximately \$574,000 to serve the most vulnerable students in our system. Under the current model, our non-disabled students are shorted this amount toward their educational needs to fund the state and federally mandated needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, school districts who have students who are exceptionally expensive to serve struggle because the high cost disability pool is only funded at about 40% of the true cost. This is especially burdensome to the budget of a small district where a student who costs \$100,000 to serve (not totally uncommon) takes a large percentage of resources from the remaining students when compared to larger districts as a whole. We respectfully ask that the high cost disability fund be increased to cover the full unfunded cost of serving these students' needs.

We also ask for help with the unfunded mandates recently put into place (or under consideration) by the legislature, including the EV school bus requirement (Electric school buses cost 50% more than a diesel or clean propane bus), the unemployment compensation mandate for classified employees (who are now paid not to work during school breaks), and the class size bargaining requirement being currently considered in the legislature.

Lastly, support for early childhood services is severely lacking on Oregon. Inadvertent cuts to the Early Intervention / Early Childhood Special Education program last year must be reversed. Additionally, resources for Employment Related Day Care and Preschool Promise are needed. Programs for our youngest learners give students a running start to succeed as they begin school, yet Oregon does not provide help for many students who need it. It is embarrassing that a state like Florida, with its conservative politics and low taxes can support universal voluntary pre-Kindergarten programs and Oregon chooses not to. These programs frequently allow students to avoid needing special education services once they get into K12 schooling, which is a wise investment that avoids ongoing costs.

Having listened to the other testimony at the hearing in Astoria, I am aware that there are multifaceted needs in our state. However, education is an investment that addresses poverty and homelessness before it starts. It is a driving force for equity and is perhaps one of the only places left in our society where all people, regardless of their backgrounds or political persuasions, come together to promote a better future. Please invest in our schools.