



BEFORE THE: Senate Education and General Govt. Committee
REGARDING: Senate Bill 273 - Support
BY: Morgan Allen, Legislative Specialist
DATE: 2-12-13

Chair Hass and members of the Senate Education Committee, for the record, my name is Morgan Allen and I am a legislative specialist for the Oregon School Boards Association. I am here today to urge your support for Senate Bill 273, which would represent the first major state investment in school building and renovation since the passage of Ballot Measure 68 in 2010.

Background

When almost 66% of Oregonians approved Measure 68 in May 2010, they made two important changes to our state constitution. The first change broadened the allowable uses for school district capital bonds to allow districts to not only build new schools, but to furnish, equip and maintain those schools with their bond funds. The second change gave the state the same bonding authority to raise funds for capital construction in K-12 districts that it has for community colleges and the Oregon University System. These bond proceeds can only be used as matching funds to help pay for capital costs incurred by school districts that have voter approved bonds.

The funds raised by Senate Bill 273 will help create incentives for local districts to pass bonds for their schools and will especially help communities that may have a low tax base make major investments in their school buildings.

You may remember that the legislature established a school facilities task force in 2009 and extended their work in 2011. Unfortunately, the funding to provide Oregon's first comprehensive assessment of the facilities needs in our school districts was not made available. However, the task force did reinforce the need for major capital investments in school districts across Oregon. You only need to drive into almost any district in Oregon to see old buildings or portable classrooms that were never intended to serve as permanent facilities dotting the landscape.

Prioritizing Limited Resources

In Senate Bill 273 we have prioritized funding for five different areas that facilities experts tell us are of the greatest need or will be needed to help districts prepare for new state educational mandates:

- Building or retrofitting instructional space for full-day kindergarten. We know that many districts will need to do this in advance of the kindergarten formula change in 2015.
- Building or retrofitting space available for physical education. There is ample data that shows districts will need to increase space for the PE mandate that begins in 2017.
- Tsunami and earthquake upgrades and retrofits. There are literally dozens of shovel-ready projects that have applied for state funding but there is not enough funding available.
- Health and safety projects to address health hazards like mold and asbestos, which students across Oregon are exposed to every day.
- Projects designed to improve student achievement. A top priority if we are going to achieve the 40-40-20 goal.

Educational and Economic Benefits

There are additional benefits to the funds raised by Senate Bill 273. It means that local school districts can choose to use state matching bonds to motivate their community to make a major investment in their schools while maintaining local control. Local communities will continue to decide when and what school improvements to make; now there will be state matching dollars available to lower local costs for the project.

Increased capital investments also means new construction jobs and other employment opportunities in communities across Oregon that are still struggling with the aftermath of the latest recession. Modern, well-maintained public school buildings and facilities may also make the difference to a company looking to locate or expand their operations in Oregon.

Every Student Deserves a Quality School Facility

Oregon's students deserve to go to school in healthy environments, which includes safe, modern buildings in good working condition and free from preventable health hazards. Our members believe that the state has a shared responsibility to provide a quality education in a quality facility. We are pleased to have the support of COSA, OEA, Stand For Children, OSEA and the Oregon PTA in our efforts to secure this funding. We urge your support of Senate Bill 273. Please send this bill to Ways and means so that we can continue our work to provide modern school buildings and healthy school environments for students across Oregon.