



Date: March 24, 2021
To: Senate Education Committee, Chair Dembrow and Members
From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations
RE: *SB 804 [Mandated teacher compensation ratios]*

On behalf of OEA's 41,000 members, I am submitting this testimony in opposition to SB 804, which would seek to disrupt the fiscal, academic, and service elements of our excellent public education system.

As we understand it, this proposal seeks to destabilize the local budget law to which school districts are subject by inserting an unworkable compensation ratio based on a preference for "core academic subjects" over everything else our educators do on behalf of their students. This violates local control, would supersede the State Board of Education's role in curricular matters (see ORS 329.045)¹, and would undermine the salary schedules based on experience in favor of one determined by subject matters taught. Furthermore, this seems like a disruptive "solution" in search of a problem, given Oregon's longstanding commitment to offering a well-rounded curriculum.

First, let us examine the local budget law the bill seeks to amend. According to the Oregon Department of Revenue's local budgeting guidance², all local governments, including duly elected school boards, must engage in the 12-month budget preparation process in a way that involves the local community. Here is an excerpt from this guidance:

"Many people rely on you, as an elected or appointed official, to see that the annual budget is prepared correctly. State officials check to see that the budget is prepared and administered according to law, and citizens in your district check to see that programs they want and need are adequately funded. This makes budgeting in Oregon a joint effort between the people affected by the budget and the appointed and elected officials responsible for providing the services. To give the public ample opportunity to participate in the budgeting process, local budget law requires that a budget officer be appointed and a budget committee be formed....Notices are published, budgets are made available for public review, and at least two opportunities for public comment are provided. These requirements encourage public participation in the budget-making process and give public exposure to budgeted programs and fiscal policies before their adoption."

The local community often weighs in on individual district offerings, ensuring that local priorities are addressed, such as agricultural education in some rural districts. Arbitrary percentages may impede such preferences. Much like the "65% solution" pushed a decade ago by a political operative with no education experience, the unintended consequences of this proposed micromangement make SB 804 ill-advised.

Consider, for instance, Medford School District's innovative "Pathways" program, which encourages each student to engage in service work and internships. Would the compensation of the advisor assigned to students for this program be on the 75% or 25% side? What about student services in general, such as school nutrition, bus drivers, library/media services, financial literacy, health classes, physical education, special education, English Language Learner programs, TAG, social/emotional caregiving, academic advising, and school nurses? Will their salaries/benefits fall on the 75% or 25% side, and if on the 25% side, will some of them have to be laid off to meet this arbitrary mandate, despite state and federal requirements for these services and programs? And how will program offerings be impacted when adjustments would have to be made annually to comply with such a compensation ratio as experienced teacher salaries increase?

With respect to using the compensation schedule as a way to control curriculum, this too is unworkable. Educators are placed on a salary schedule related to their years of experience and education attainment, not their subjects taught. In small rural districts, this could be an especially challenging proposal as often, educators are multiply endorsed and teach a wide range of subject areas that may or may not fall into the "core" subjects on the 75% side of this bill's equation. Furthermore, the bill contemplates that only those expenditures that come from the general purpose grant of the State

School Fund would be counted in this ratio mandate, making budgeting for salaries even more complex, as local and federal funding streams would have to be segregated out of the calculation in order to demonstrate compliance, assuming that the 75% in SB 804 refers to **75% of the 70%** of their budgets that come from the state. If passed, this bill would also force the renegotiation of hundreds of educator contracts to comply with this scheme that would surely result, especially in small districts, in employment disruptions.

As far as the bill's elevation of "manual skills", one wonders whether what is meant is Career Technical Education (CTE), or just a subset of this important area of focus, as found in line 19 of the bill: "welding, woodworking and other related practical skills". Typically, CTE is seen as a much broader range of education topics, and includes such essential 21st century skills as technology education – hence the more global term of art. Would SB 804 exclude, for instance, Grants Pass School District's impressive and long-standing commitment to technology instruction in all of its 10 school sites? Would this fall on the 25% of the line?

For all these reasons, OEA respectfully requests that this bill not be advanced.

Endnotes

1. ORS 329.045 controls the public school system and district academic characteristics, directing the State Board of Education to "regularly and periodically review its Common Curriculum Goals, performance indicators, and diploma requirements."
2. https://www.oregon.gov/DOR/forms/FormsPubs/local-budgeting-oregon_504-400.pdf