



**Date:** March 31, 2021  
**To:** Education Subcommittee of Ways and Means, Co-chairs Frederick and McLain & Members  
**From:** John Larson, President, Oregon Education Association  
**RE:** *SB 5514 [State School Fund]*

As President of the 41,000-member OEA, it is my honor to speak to you today about the urgent need to keep our public education funding on track. In K-12, that means investing in our schools and students at a no-cuts level of \$9.6 billion for the coming biennium.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our neighborhood public schools were facing a crisis of disrupted learning. Decades of underfunding had left our schools without the wraparound services required to meet the unique needs of some of our most challenged students, and as a result education for every student suffered. In 2019, our members were proud to fight for the effort to close the 20% funding gap between this state's educational outcomes expectations and its insufficient state budgets. When the Student Success Act passed, our educators dared to dream of finally ending the disparities that exist for too many of our students. The Student Investment Grant, at \$500 million a year, promised to help our schools and our students to thrive.

**The framework budget of \$9.1 billion will result in a cut to public education next biennium that is equal to a year of this Student Investment Account dream.**

Our students and their families, have gone through more than a year of upheaval and trauma, coping with a deadly virus, with lockdowns, with economic hardship, and with all the impacts of those challenges. As our public schools work to expand in-person instruction for more students, it is our expectation that the trauma of this pandemic will only have exacerbated the disrupted learning crisis we were already facing. To help our students regain their footing, both academically and emotionally, we need to be able to re-engage, to support their needs, to rebuild our learning communities. Our students need your investment in them now more than ever. At the co-chairs' framework level, a 1% increase in funding for the next two years, that investment will not happen. Cuts will.

You have the power and the resources to do better. Oregon's latest forecast gave us good news: there is no longer a huge revenue shortfall. There are, additionally, positive revenue policy steps you could take to build a more sustainable stream of resources for the coming years. Our reserves are healthy, our COVID-related fiscal needs are being met with federal support, and a vaccinated public will only bring better news as time goes on. There is literally no reason to set in motion a new downward spiral that comes from the inevitable cuts and layoffs that will occur without adequate funding.

Our public school system is the state's largest employer. Its product is the future of this state and her people. We respectfully ask this subcommittee and the legislative leadership to put our students first. \$9.6 billion in the State School Fund is the way to do that.

Thank you.