



April 12, 2021

Subject: Increase Education Budget

To: Sen. Betsy Johnson, Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, Rep. Dan Rayfield and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

We start with sincere thanks for your continued service to Oregon and for your steadfast leadership through these most difficult times.

Clearly, the decisions we make today will be critical to Oregon's recovery from the pandemic; and while the global pandemic has been hard on all of us, it's been particularly hard on our children. Budgets being drafted in Salem must not fall short of meeting our children's needs, especially those in communities most impacted by the pandemic.

As the superintendents of Education Service Districts representing a wide swath of Oregon's geography and population, we are advocating a prioritization of resources to the children and families farthest from opportunity in our communities. Investing in the following critical program areas that serve our most marginalized learners creates the necessary conditions for their success in school and beyond:

- **Regional Inclusive Services** (formerly Regional Programs): Oregon's 11,000+ students who experience significant disabilities such as visual impairment, deafness and/or blindness, traumatic brain injury, orthopedic impairments and autism need an accessible and inclusive education in their neighborhood school. Regional Inclusive Services provides the training, technical tools, and consultation to educators necessary for our schools, no matter their size or location, to deliver an inclusive education. Adjusting for inflation, total funding for this critical statewide program has fallen by more than 20% since 2007. As a result, at a time when significant investments have been made for others in K-12 education, many critical services for the students and families who need us most have been reduced or eliminated. Subsequently, incidences of children not able to access educational services have demonstrably increased in the last decade. Despite much greater long-term funding needs, in order to begin to restore services at this critical juncture, **we urge an additional \$10 million investment for the 2021-23 biennium as a stop gap measure.**
- **Student Success Act:** The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened already entrenched inequities for historically underserved students including Oregon's Tribal, Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and other communities of color; students navigating poverty; and students

living in rural communities. ESDs have played a central role in ensuring Student Investment Account plans are focused on the students who need the most, and that school districts have quality technical support for program implementation as they roll out innovative, equity-centered programs. ESD's have been critical liaisons for local schools with ODE in ensuring community and student voice, and best practice research, are centered in decision-making. We must not waver on the vision and legislative intent of the SSA. **We urge fully funding the technical assistance grants to ESD's in the Student Success Act at \$42 million.**

- **Early Learning Hubs:** Our youngest learners are at a particular disadvantage due to the pandemic. Important developmental milestones not met now, equate to costly and intensive interventions down the road. Early Learning Hubs play the invaluable role of convening partners in identifying and closing gaps in services. They will be instrumental to recovery efforts and **we urge your support for fully restored Early Learning Hub funding.**
- **State School Fund:** These initiatives, like all other intervention services, must be built upon a solid foundation. The State School Fund is currently slated to receive \$9.1 billion in the next budget. Our business managers calculate that is \$500 million short of what it will cost schools to maintain operations at the same levels as the last budget. While federal relief dollars will help schools reopen, general operations cannot be sustained with one-time resources, and ESDs were not contemplated by Congress when they passed these bills. Without adequate funding in the State School Fund, Oregon's education system is most assuredly heading for a fiscal cliff. **We urge the committee to fund the State School Fund minimally at \$9.6 billion.**

Thank you for your service. Respectfully,



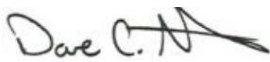
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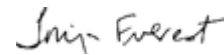
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