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Co-Chairs Senator Johnson, Senator Steiner Hayward, and Representative Rayfield
Oregon Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Legislature

April 21, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward, and Rayfield, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

The global pandemic has interrupted, but not stopped, the amazing progress our state is making to address long term systemic inequities in education, so I write with hope for our future, our children's future. Yet, as a board member at Lane Education Service District and Chair of the Governance Council of the Oregon Association of ESDs, I am privileged to understand how students and school districts all over Oregon have navigated the pandemic, and despite our best efforts, the gaps in opportunity widened. The need to invest in our students has never been more clear.

The phenomenal process that resulted in the Student Success Act in 2019 included \$24 million of funding (for one year) to Education Service Districts to support local K-12 school districts in their plans and implementation to close opportunity gaps particularly impacting currently and historically marginalized students, including students impacted by poverty, BIPOC students, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, and migrant and immigrants students. The SSA does not fund ESDs through other means, although almost all Oregon districts relied upon their ESDs to support them through the pandemic closures, distance learning, reopening plans, understanding the metrics and safety requirements, and understanding the different impacts of the pandemic on student learning. Despite this, all of the ESDs were able to respond to the calls for assistance for pandemic response, and we anticipate that these needs will increase as SSA programming begins in earnest with students even more impacted by the inequities exacerbated by the pandemic. We ask the legislature to maintain within the Student Success Act funding for ESDs, whose services are universally valued and sought by our component K-12 districts, at the \$42 million level, approximately maintaining current service levels.

Second, Lane ESD provides a critical service to students impacted by disabilities, such as hearing, sight, and speech loss or impairment, traumatic brain injuries, and other disabilities that require special equipment and staff expertise to engage students in learning - these are students whose potential could have been lost simply because of lack of equitable access and appropriate instruction. As a board member, students have demonstrated to me how assistive devices and specialized instruction has allowed them to participate fully in their education, to self advocate and maintain their own human dignity. Yet these programs, funded as "Regional Inclusive Services" which support equity and access for students with disabilities all over the

state, have lost about 20% of their funding since 2007 (adjusted for inflation), leaving some of our most vulnerable students without necessary access to education. I ask for a \$10 million increase in Regional Inclusive Services (formerly Regional Programs) in the 21-23 biennium to make up for these funding losses and assure that students with disabilities also can fully and equitably access public education.

I am concerned that the current budget framework does not adequately address the true costs of all K-12 public education - for all of our districts to continue current services without cuts in programs or staff, our business managers agree that an increase in the State School Fund is necessary, to \$9.6 billion. Although we continue to make progress in addressing cost drivers like health care and pensions, we must invest sufficiently in our workforce and students to maintain safe and healthy school environments. Federal COVID recovery money is only a one time investment, and did not include ESDs within their allocations, leaving schools still in need of our support, but without a funding source to maintain our staff providing that critical recovery aid nor a long term commitment to sustain K-12 or ESD services. Please increase the state school fund to \$9.6 billion to help ALL Oregon students through their school districts and ESD partnerships.

Finally, ESDs provide a critical link in our education system between early learning and K-12 education. Our early learning hubs provide critical funding and support to improve the quality and quantity of affordable child care in our region, yet the funding to the early learning hubs has been reduced in the current budget. In the interest of assuring safe and quality learning environments for all of our children, I request a restoration of the early learning hub funding to maintain current service levels. I also applaud the investment in early intervention and early childhood education funding represented in the co-chairs' budget framework. As you make necessary adjustments and compromises, please hold EI/ECSE funding harmless.

With respect and appreciation to our elected public servants and all who make your work possible,



Rose Wilde
Board Member, Lane Education Service District
Chair, Oregon Association of Education Service Districts