



February 1, 2023

Chair Neron, Vice Chair Wright, Members of the Committee:

My name is Kyndall Mason, I am a public affairs consultant for the Oregon Education Association. We represent more than 41,000 educators, classified staff, and specialists in Oregon's public K-12 and Community College systems. This testimony is in support of HB 2690 and stands as a reminder that if Oregon's students' needs are our number one priority, then we must invest in the educators who are in the classrooms with them. I will not take long, as three members are here to detail the realities of being an educator in Oregon.

I want to first acknowledge that Oregon public school spending ranks in the bottom half of the nation, this means we have some of the lowest starting wages for educators in the country, which is part of what led us to the broken system you see now. Without a commitment from the legislature to invest in our classrooms, Oregon will continue to fall further and further into crisis. I'd like to give you a few numbers before passing it off to a few members, Joanne, Lindsay and Jessica.

31st, Oregon ranks 31st in starting educator wages. When we ask ourselves, why don't people want to teach? Or why are our classroom sizes out of whack? The answer lies squarely in what we ask of them, and what they will be compensated in return. Oregon's average starting educator wage is \$39k. And today's classrooms are not yesterday's. The classroom has been devastated by a global pandemic, from which we are still trying to recover. What used to be considered standard lessons are now considered political agendas that school boards, districts and educators are targeted for. Students are coming to school with mental and behavioral health issues at a rate that feels insurmountable. Take all of these circumstances into account and add in that inflation has caused educator salaries to fall further and further behind, we see that both our educators and our students are the collateral damage in this crisis. Simply put, the job is stressful, and it can hard to reconcile making such a low starting wage, for the stress educators are experiencing.

64%, The state makes up 64% of total funds in our public-school systems. This number is an almost total reversal in support for public schools from decades before. As of 2011, and after the passage of both Measures 5 and 50, school funding was turned on its head. The legislature now sets the lion's share of budget for public schools with less stability and vulnerable to times of economic downturn. If we resource what we value, and we want to show our students and our educators that we value them, we must take active steps toward livable wages for new educators and demonstrate the investment we want to their longevity in the profession.

4.6%. According to an OregonLive article this past December, Oregon spends 4.6% less than the national average per student. That is a statement of our values in public schools. Funding schools appropriately would mean better outcomes for students and educators.

30%. In Oregon, people who have a comparable level of education and training make 30% more. College is already a barrier to many, add to it the fact that literally any job, with a similar level of education and training, will pay more than becoming a teacher then you must ask yourself, why would someone become a teacher?

Oregon is not the only state grappling with a crisis in public education, but we lag behind other states who have taken unique and bold approaches to resolving this crisis. The Mississippi legislature just passed an increase in educator wages, putting them at \$41k annually. Hawaii was suffering from a dearth of educators in special education. The legislature there offered a \$10k annual differential for educators working in special education. Now, they are not experiencing the crisis they were just a few years ago. And we have some wonderful models here in the state from some local districts that have taken initiative: Centennial School District just ratified a contract that sets a wage floor of \$50k for incoming educators. If we want to stabilize our schools, our classrooms, there is no silver bullet, but we do know that without increasing wages for educators we will not be able to recruit or retain quality educators in our state, especially when we have neighboring states, like Washington and California, who are offering higher wages for the same job. While some districts are doing the right thing, the state has a role in setting long-term standards and support.

In Oregon, we have over 195 school district contracts, this means our wages are all over the place. It means that rural area teachers leave to teach in urban areas in hopes of a better wage. It means that there is no standard and that essentially, we are in a race to the bottom, pitting the regions of our state against one another. Let's be sure that we are telling Oregon families, "it's doesn't matter where you live, your child will have a good public education" and let's start by setting a floor here in Oregon for educator wages.

Before I end, I want to let the committee know we are working on amendments to this bill that include a contract opener and we are open to negotiation on what setting a wage floor in Oregon would look like.

Thank you for your time today.

Sincerely,

Kyndall Mason

Public Affairs Consultant, Oregon Education Association