

**HB 2710 Legislative Testimony
Monday, February 27, 2023
House Committee on Education**

Chair Neron, Vice Chair Wright and members of the House Education Committee. For the record, my name is Amanda Manjarrez and I am the Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs at Foundations for a Better Oregon. **I'm here today to speak in support of House Bill 2710.**

Foundations for a Better Oregon is a project of Oregon's 5 largest philanthropic foundations including the Oregon Community Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, Ford Family Foundation, the Collins Foundation, and the Miller Foundation. Our mission is to ensure Oregon provides every child the opportunities and supports they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

Our commitment to this bold vision means that in our advocacy we strive to go beyond surface level solutions and instead focus more on creating the conditions for impacted communities to work in partnership with our public institutions, including policymakers, state and education leaders, and philanthropy, to create a more equitable and impactful public education system for Oregon children from cradle to career.

We believe the basic level of transparency required in House Bill 2710 for Oregon's State School Fund will give everyone in our state who cares about the future of our children the opportunity to work together to address some of the deep challenges facing our public education system.

Today, I also wanted to share some background on what inspired this legislation. In 2021, I was asked by the Oregon Department of Education, along with many other education stakeholders, to participate in an advisory group to support a study focused on State School Fund spending patterns in 25 school districts in Oregon to understand the impact State School Fund investments have on disparities in student outcomes at the local level. **In 2021, the Legislature directed ODE to conduct the study in a budget note with a \$500,000 allocation.**

During our first few meetings, some of us on the committee were surprised to learn that the state could not meet the specific charge called for by the legislature because, as we were told, the state does not have access to State School Fund spending information from local districts. We also learned that districts might not even be able to provide this information because, in many cases, after districts receive state school fund grant dollars from the state, they blend those with other funds in their general operating accounts and, therefore, state school fund expenditures cannot be distinguished from the other funds in district budgets.

Because we did not have access to local state school fund spending information, the study shifted from focusing on the State School Fund, our largest investment in Oregon public schools, to include other funding sources, including the Student Success Act, federal grants,

and other investments that do require specific tracking and reporting. Just as we know how important it is to districts that the state accurately calculate the State School Fund distributions, we believe it is equally important to have the ability to calculate district expenditures to the same degree of certainty. Unfortunately, this is not the only instance where I have encountered this issue of not having enough information to address the problems we're trying to solve in policy and budget work groups related to education.

I wanted to share this context because as this policy was developed, we have heard from communities who are struggling and leaders who want to do more than only requiring transparency doesn't go far enough to create accountability around our state school fund investments. We've also heard from some of the school advocates you'll likely hear from today that this is just too burdensome or that the information that districts already share with the state should be enough.

We believe the bill in front of you strikes the appropriate balance between these two positions, by requiring ODE to collect specific information about how districts invest the dollars they receive from Oregon's state school fund each year to serve students and to do so in accordance with the state produced finance manual that districts are already required to comply with and which is already updated on a regular basis by ODE in partnership with a committee of school business managers and other technical experts.

We know there is no silver bullet solution that will solve the deep, systemic challenges that we're facing in public education. We also know that we can't solve problems we don't understand and believe strongly that greater transparency around Oregon's largest investment in our public education system will give us all a better view of how our system operates statewide. Transparent and accessible information is critical to creating a stronger, equitable, education system that is equipped to provide every student in Oregon with the high-quality learning and supports they need and deserve.

We ask you to vote yes HB 2710 and to work with us on building a better future for our kids.

Thank you.

Amanda Manjarrez
Director of Public Policy & Government Affairs
Foundations for a Better Oregon