



TO: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
FR: George Mendoza, on behalf of the COSA Board of Directors
RE: Testimony regarding State School Fund budget (House Bill 5015)

Good morning Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain and members of the Committee,

My name is George Mendoza, I am the Superintendent of the La Grande School District and serve on the Board of Directors of the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators (COSA). I am here today on behalf of our 2,800 members across Oregon, asking you to increase the proposed State School Fund budget from \$9.9 billion to \$10.3 billion.

Why Oregon Students Need A \$10.3 Billion State School Fund

Strong schools are critical to Oregon's future, and we need the Legislature's help in order to keep providing consistent and stable supports for our students, schools, and communities. At the top of COSA's priority list for the 2023 Session is ensuring that students have consistent education and mental health services needed to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, accelerate academically, and improve their overall well-being.

The past few years have upended the lives of so many of our students and communities. Every educator I speak to will tell you that the needs of our students and their families have never been greater. Students in every school district in Oregon are in a critical education situation and need the supports and services our schools provide or some of them may never be able to recover. This is not the time for layoffs and cutting days, we have to be in a growth mode mentality for our students.

The Oregon Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) surveyed school districts across Oregon and has determined that \$10.3 billion is necessary to just maintain current core programs, staffing levels, and services for our students. To be clear - we are not asking for new investments in K-12, but a \$10.3 billion SSF is necessary to cover K-12's increased costs, maintain our current staff and programs, and address our significant inflationary costs.

Your leadership on the K-12 education budget will help ensure that our schools continue to be safe centers at the heart of our local communities that can help students:

- Recover from the impacts of the pandemic through consistent educational and mental health supports
- Accelerate academically using targeted interventions
- Improve their well-being by providing wraparound services

In La Grande, our enrollment is down over 240 students since the pandemic started which has resulted in reducing our workforce by 13 staff members. Additionally, our district has kept 10 staff on to support students using ESSER funds to provide critically needed student services.

At \$9.9 billion, my district will not be able to cover our roll-up costs and keep staff we are currently paying for with ESSER funding. We are facing the perfect storm of inadequate state funding, expiring federal funding, and negative enrollment impacts from the pandemic at a time when our remaining 2088 students need our help the most.

Without a State School Fund appropriation of \$10.3 billion, we will have no choice but to reduce teaching, classified, and administrative positions next school year.

A State School Fund Allocation of \$9.9 Billion Means Difficult Choices

A \$9.9 billion State School Fund appropriation will mean a budget shortfall for school districts across Oregon. Over the next several weeks, you will be hearing from your districts about the impacts of this budget and their ability to serve their students.

I know that overall K-12 funding is significant and we are grateful for the Legislature's support throughout the pandemic for our students. But please remember that our funding is not interchangeable. High School Success is targeted toward CTE and graduation. The Student Investment Account is targeted toward equitable investments to better serve our students and their communities, including reducing class sizes and investing in resources to help with the social, emotional, and mental health of our students. Both funds are meant to supplement the operational funding of school districts in the State School Fund. And federal ESSER funds are expiring and will no longer be able to help support our students and staff.

The State School Fund is still the primary source of funding for our school districts and ESDs. A budget that does not meet our financial needs means we take a huge step backward in our ability to serve students and diminish the impact of the historic investments the Legislature has made.

Our Request is a State School Fund Appropriation of \$10.3 Billion

We look forward to working with you to ensure that we have the resources we need to support all of our students in every school district across Oregon. We stand ready to partner, assist and support your efforts to make the needed investments in our students and schools.

Thank you for your time today.