

May 16, 2025

Speaker Fahey, Majority Leader Bowman, House Republican Leader Drazan, and Members of the Oregon House of Representatives:

As the Superintendents of the largest school districts across Oregon, we respectfully write to urge you to oppose SB 916 A. We must share the serious financial strain and administrative burden this bill would place on school districts—especially during a time of profound fiscal uncertainty. The core of our concern is simple: **every public dollar intended for education must be spent in a way that directly benefits students.**

Our districts are already facing substantial budget deficits. With limited state resources available this session and looming cuts to federal education funding, we are bracing for a difficult year of tough, heartbreaking choices and constrained budgets. In this environment, any policy that increases district expenses—no matter how well-intended—risks further diverting critical resources away from students and classrooms.

SB 916 A may create new financial pressures that could affect how we allocate resources to support educational services. As you know, public employers like school districts in Oregon are directly responsible for covering unemployment benefits—these costs are paid dollar-for-dollar by each school district. Should this bill pass, districts like ours would be required to cover the costs of unemployment payments for labor disputes, further reducing already tight budgets. We simply do not have the financial capacity to absorb new and unplanned costs of this nature without significant impacts on students, including the possibility of shorter school years, increased class sizes, or reductions in critical student programs and support services.

We appreciate the amendment to SB 916 A, intended to make the bill “cost-neutral” for school districts by ensuring that districts do not pay more than 100% of an employee’s compensation. Unfortunately, from both a policy and operational standpoint, this provision raises serious implementation concerns. Whether school districts have to receive confirmation of UI benefits paid before they can process partial backpay to striking employees, or to recover UI benefits that are clawed back from employees, school districts may be left in prolonged financial limbo. According to information from the Oregon Employment Department, districts may not see reimbursement for UI benefits for months following a strike—if at all—leading to significant cash flow issues during already difficult budget years. For districts that finalize their budgets in June, these unknown costs and timelines further complicate fiscal planning and threaten to destabilize student services.

In short, SB 916 A introduces a high-stakes fiscal risk at a time when our focus must remain squarely on delivering for students under the most challenging circumstances. We urge you to prioritize containing costs for school districts so that we can direct more resources to our students. We respectfully ask you to oppose SB 916 A.

Thank you for your consideration and for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gustavo Balderas, Superintendent
Beaverton School District

Dr. Steven Cook, Superintendent
Bend-La Pine Schools

John Koch, Superintendent
Gresham-Barlow School District

Travis Reiman, Superintendent
Hillsboro School District

Jeanne Grazioli, Interim Superintendent
Medford School District

Dr. Kimberlee Armstrong, Superintendent
Portland Public Schools

Andrea Castañeda, Superintendent
Salem-Keizer Public Schools

Iton Udosenata, Superintendent
Tigard-Tualatin School District