



TINA KOTEK
GOVERNOR

March 11, 2025

The Honorable Courtney Neron
The Honorable April Dobson
The Honorable Emily McIntire
House Education Committee
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Neron, and Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire,

Last time I testified in front of this committee, I spoke about my proposal to give school districts more fiscal predictability for future budget cycles through HB 2140. As a result, my recommended budget asks for a historic \$11.36 billion investment in the State School Fund.

But as I said then, this increased investment cannot be a blank check. Oregon students deserve more than the status quo. We have a responsibility to use state dollars in a way that delivers the best education for every Oregon student.

I recognize we are at a critical moment for our state's education system. We have a state full of incredible students, as well as dedicated educators who work hard every day to make students' lives better. I acknowledge and appreciate all the hard work happening in classrooms throughout Oregon.

But it is clear that our schools' academic outcomes are recovering slower compared to other states following the pandemic. Nationally, Oregon is in the middle of the pack for per pupil spending, but our outcomes are some of the worst. This highlights a problem with our accountability system.

The goal of House Bill 2009 is to go back to basics and build a stronger accountability framework for ensuring better student outcomes.

State leaders and Oregon families need better visibility into how students are doing. And we need to build on what is working. Our state currently tracks outcomes based on five metrics named in the 2019 Student Success Act. We look at these to evaluate school district success – regular attendance, 3rd grade reading proficiency, 9th grade on track, 4-year graduation, and 5-year completion.

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The -1 amendment to House Bill 2009 builds on that existing work by adding two new metrics to Oregon’s accountability system – Kindergarten Attendance and 8th Grade Math Proficiency. Research shows these are also strong predictors of student success.

The amendment also standardizes the use of “interim assessments,” which measure student performance growth over the course of the school year, allowing teachers and districts to get a better sense of what’s working so they can make real-time adjustments to drive better student outcomes.

And when a district’s outcomes do not improve over time, we have to take a more hands-on approach to help them get on the right track. The proposed amendment includes required coaching and support when districts haven’t met their growth targets for three years. Right now, that coaching is available but optional for school districts. For districts that haven’t met their growth targets for four years, the state will be able to direct spending for up to 25% of State School Fund and Student Investment Account dollars to help ensure funding is going to best practices that will improve outcomes.

Additionally, to ensure all Oregon students have access to high-quality literacy instruction, this proposal would require school districts to adopt research-aligned instructional materials for early literacy. Our students deserve to have access to the best possible instructional materials. That is why this bill would eliminate the currently required publisher fees – the publisher “pay to play” approach that has been used for publishers to submit instructional materials to the state agency for evaluation and approval.

In my conversations with education leaders, a reoccurring theme is how bureaucratic administrative requirements get in the way of our shared goal of delivering a high-quality education. Oregon’s education system has a complicated web of programs, funding streams, and reporting processes. We need to give schools back more of their time to focus on students, not paperwork.

The -1 amendment thus directs the Oregon Department of Education to review reporting requirements, programs, and processes that do the same thing, and figure out what can be streamlined.

Bureaucratic burden is also a consequence of Oregon’s long list of Division 22 and Division 24 standards, requirements for a standard school district or education service district. These standards should better reflect the health and strength of district infrastructure to support academic achievement, but currently the list of standards is long and not every standard directly aligns to better academic outcomes. The amendment directs ODE to review and prioritize these, to focus us on the things we know work and help school staff spend less time doing paperwork and more time helping students.

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The state has to hold up its end of the bargain. This bill goes hand in hand with a set of directions I have made to ODE to be more responsive, transparent, and to operate with best practices. I have directed the agency to consolidate grants to ease the workload for school districts, strengthen data collection and public transparency, improve internal operations, elevate existing best practices and develop responsive support for school districts across Oregon.

Getting public education right is one of the biggest promises we make to Oregonians. Students and families want a quality public education that works for them. When schools aren't delivering for students, we all have to step up. It's time to be clear-eyed about our numbers and change how the state and districts work together on improving student outcomes.

This bill aligns us with Oregonians who believe school districts must set clear, data-driven goals to improve student outcomes, and that the state must be a better partner in providing guidance to support those outcomes.

If we are going to restore trust in our public education system, we can't leave this session without this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tina Kotek". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tina" and last name "Kotek" clearly distinguishable.

Governor Tina Kotek