

To: Sen. Kate Lieber, Co-Chair, Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Rep. Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair, Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Cc: Senator Janeen Sollman, Co-Chair, Subcommittee On Education
Representative Ricki Ruiz, Co-Chair, Subcommittee On Education
Senator Lew Frederick
Senator Suzanne Weber
Representative Susan McLain
Representative Hoa Nguyen
Representative Boomer Wright
Representative Dwayne Yunker

Re: SB 5515, Oregon Department of Education, Recovery Schools Funding

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez; Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz; and members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education:

The below signed organizations, schools and Education Service Districts and School Districts are writing in strong support of **funding ODE's recovery high schools** in the 2025-27 biennium, **at the full \$12.7 million** requested by the agency.

If this funding is not secured, Oregon's three existing recovery schools will be forced to face service and enrollment cuts over the next biennium:

- Harmony Academy (**Clackamas County**)
- Rivercrest Academy (**Multnomah County**)
- Discovery Academy (**Marion County**)

In addition, there are *at least* four districts ready to open a recovery high school, who will be forced to close their doors before even opening them, if full funding is not secured:

- Southern Oregon Education Service District (**Jackson County**)
- La Grande School District (**Union County**)
- Northwest Regional Education Service District (**Tillamook/Clatsop County**)
- Lane Education Service District (**Lane County**)

It is critical that we have your support to fund recovery schools in full over the coming years.

For the 2025-27 biennium, the Oregon Department of Education requested \$12.7M in total funding in order to sustain these three existing recovery high schools, and open new schools in three of these four districts that are ready. This expansion is designed to fulfill ODE's commitment to the Oregon Legislature, which prioritized the funding and opening of three new recovery high schools each biennium, thanks to the passage of [HB 2767](#) during the 2023 Legislative Session.

Unfortunately, when the Governor's Recommended Budget was released this December, it included a recommendation to **cut ODE's recovery school budget *in half***. If this recommendation stands, ODE simply cannot keep its commitment to expanding recovery schools in rural and underserved parts of the state – a promise that was important to the Oregon Legislature in 2023, and remains an important commitment to the Department and advocates today.

Right now, there are districts in Southern Oregon, Eastern Oregon and communities along the Oregon Coast that are ready to open recovery schools, but without adequate funding, they will be forced to shut their doors before even having the chance to welcome students inside. **This is unacceptable.** We have been preparing for the promise of funding in the 2025-27 biennium to help serve students in these regions struggling with substance use disorder and co-occurring disorders, and now is not the time to turn these students away.

Post-treatment research has shown that students who attend a recovery high school are up to **four times as likely to remain sober**¹ within just six months of enrollment, compared to students who have to return to their residential high schools. At such a young age, it is too easy to fall into cycles of stigma, shame, peer pressure or substance exposure when going back to the same school or peer groups you had before entering into recovery – it simply doesn't work. Students with substance use disorder are proven to have significantly better learning outcomes and to live happier, healthier lives when attending a recovery-focused high school instead.

That's because recovery schools offer a different, highly-specialized approach to education. With substance-free campuses, peer support programs, recovery plans, accountability, recovery specialists, mentors and recovery coaches, students who attend recovery high schools have a customized, supportive environment that

¹ Yule AM, Kelly JF. Recovery high schools may be a key component of youth recovery support services. Am J Drug Alcohol Abuse. 2018. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6037163/>

understands and supports their unique health care challenges, while simultaneously supporting their education and progress toward graduation. In fact, recovery high schools report **significantly improved school attendance**² and a **21-25% increase in graduation rates**³ for students with SUD.

Attending a recovery high school not only has a positive impact on its students, but a positive financial impact on the state. Estimates show that for every \$1 that is invested into a student's enrollment in a recovery high school, there is an average of \$3-7 saved in the long-run – with the **average savings ranging from \$16,000-\$52,000 per student**.³ The benefit is substantial. Recovery high school students have a reduced need for repeated treatment, reduced risk of emergency medical attention, reduced risk of criminal activity, and self-identify as happier and healthier young adults – giving them the opportunity to lead vibrant, thriving lives that will give back to their communities well into adulthood.

The cost-benefit analysis for recovery high schools speaks for itself, but the bottom line is even more simple than that: **recovery schools save lives.**

Right now, Oregon has the opportunity to expand these life-saving services outside of the Willamette Valley and into rural parts of the state – exactly as HB 2767 requires and was designed to do. With a \$6.3M cut from the GRB, ODE simply cannot make these expansions happen. A [2025-27 Budget Scenario Analysis](#) from ODE illustrates the true impact of these budget cuts. While the GRB recommended ODE use its remaining money to open at least one new school, the truth of the matter is, that is simply not possible.

The dollars that remain in ODE's budget for recovery schools is not enough to open any new schools, let alone fully support the enrollment projections at the existing three schools. In the scenario that ODE funds the existing three schools at their recommended service levels, there is simply not enough money for growth:

“Unfortunately,” ODE states in its March 5, 2025 Budget Analysis about funding recovery schools at their recommended service levels, “this scenario does not allow for any new schools to open in the 2025-27 biennium. While this scenario does

² Andrew J. Finch, Emily Tanner-Smith, Emily Hennessy, & D. Paul Moberg (2017): Recovery high schools: effect of schools supporting recovery from substance use disorders, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28767275/>

³ David L. Weimer, Paul Moberg, Falon French, Emily Tanner-Smith & Andrew J. Finch (2019): Net Benefits of Recovery High Schools: Higher Cost but Increased Sobriety and Educational Attainment, The Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31811754/>.

provide the necessary funding for the [existing] schools to sustain operations, the currently approved recovery schools will be limited in their student enrollment growth over the next two years.”

These cuts to recovery schools are simply not the right place to save a buck. The cut in the GRB is a drop in the bucket for the state’s budget, but it is everything that ODE needs to ensure that students in every corner of Oregon can access these life-saving schools and serve students at their fullest capacities.

If the Legislature prioritizes the full **\$12.7M** in requested funding for recovery schools, Oregon can **double its impact in the state**, keep the promise we made to **open rural recovery schools**, and ultimately save the lives of countless Oregon youth. Now is not the time to give up on this commitment made just two short years ago. Momentum is building in the recovery community for these schools and the Department is ready to support them in every corner of Oregon. We must act now to fund recovery high schools in full this Legislative Session.

With that, we urge your support to **fund recovery schools at the full \$12.7M**, and thank you for your tremendously difficult job of ensuring that Oregon’s resources are spent wisely and effectively.

Signed,

