



To: Joint Subcommittee on Education

From: Anthony Castaneda, SEIU 503

Date: 3/27/2025

RE: Oregon Department of Education Budget

Dear Co-chair Sollman, Co-chair Ruiz and members of the committee,

My name is Anthony Castaneda, and I am writing on behalf of SEIU 503 in support of the Oregon Department of Education's budget (SB 5515) and urge this committee to ensure that federally funded positions are retained. Resources and staff are key to improving our education system and developing targeted programs while addressing issues like educational disparities, student mental health, absenteeism and test scores. Our union represents roughly 500 workers at the Oregon Department of Education.

I want to recognize that we are operating and trying to make decisions under a cloud of uncertainty at the federal level. It was only last week that we learned that the Executive Branch of the U.S. government signed an executive order to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education.

Our ODE dedicated staff are already stretched thin, wearing multiple hats. With calls for state level accountability, the legislature needs to ensure that the agency is set up for success by maintaining current staff levels and hiring additional staff to manage accountability projects. The staffing issue is compounded by federal threats to cut federally funded positions who manage critical programs. Not only would cuts lead to fewer staff but the department loses invaluable institutional knowledge and expertise. It would take years to rebuild from scratch.

Without investment in our ODE and staff, Oregon will be unable to weather the storm if the U.S. Department of Education is dismantled. Currently, the federal government provides funding for rural and underserved districts, Title IX low-income school districts, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In Oregon, cuts to IDEA funds alone would impact 83,000 young learners with disabilities. This comes at a time when the USDA also cut over 1,000,000,000 in the Farm to School programs. For Oregon, this means a

roughly \$6M lost in federal funding. The federal government cuts effectively limit our ability to contract with local producers, effectively ending these and other innovative programs.

In summary, the Oregon legislature has an opportunity to commit to our K-12 students and invest in education and ODE. The department will need the staff to work with school districts to improve educational outcomes while responding to the federal government. Changes in federal law, such as funding shifts or new educational mandates, could still affect state-level education systems.

Thank you,

Anthony Castaneda