

Submitter: Lisa Lanza

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4067

I am submitting this testimony based on over 20 years working in rural Oregon education, including direct leadership roles as a STEM Hub Director and a TRIO Director at a local community college. What I have witnessed firsthand is a systemic misuse of public funds that does not meaningfully improve student learning—particularly in science—and diverts money away from where it is most needed: classrooms and teachers.

STEM Hubs: A Costly and Ineffective Middle Layer

I worked directly inside a STEM Hub. These hubs are presented as innovative solutions, but in practice they function as expensive intermediaries that funnel money through community colleges and administrative structures with little accountability and minimal classroom impact.

I personally observed:

Excessive spending on food, travel, and meetings

Overstaffing and administrative bloat

Funds used to sustain programs and positions rather than student learning

Very little direct investment in hiring or supporting actual STEM teachers

From the inside, it was clear that STEM Hubs are a poor return on investment. The same funding, if sent directly to schools, could hire science teachers, provide classroom materials, and ensure students actually receive science instruction.

Outdoor School Funding: The Same Structural Problem

HB 4112 proposes increasing lottery funding for Outdoor School. While outdoor education has value, this approach repeats the same mistake: creating or expanding auxiliary programs instead of fixing the core problem.

The reality—especially in rural Oregon—is this:

Science is not being taught in elementary schools, particularly K-5

Teachers are under pressure to focus almost exclusively on reading and math

Outdoor School becomes a substitute for science instead of a supplement

Rather than funding standalone programs, Oregon should fund science instruction directly in K–8 schools, embedded in the school day, taught by qualified educators.

TRIO and the Oregon TRIO Association (OTA): A Unique and Troubling Case

Oregon is the only state in the nation that funds its own TRIO association (OTA). As a former TRIO Director, I can state plainly that this funding structure is a serious misuse of both state and federal resources.

I observed:

OTA leadership working remotely with minimal deliverables

A single annual conference used to justify an entire organization

Persistent efforts to spend federal TRIO funds in ways the grants explicitly prohibit (Federal TRIO money is paid to OTA to use grant funds in ways not allowed directly)

Time and money spent on workarounds instead of student services

This funding does not improve access or outcomes for students. It sustains an organization, not a mission.

A Better Solution: Fund Schools, Not Systems

If Oregon is serious about studying and improving the adequacy of education, the answer is not more layers, hubs, or associations. The solution is straightforward:

Eliminate wasteful intermediary programs

Send funding directly to schools

Use funds to hire certified teachers—especially science teachers

Prioritize K–8 science instruction during the regular school day

Reduce auxiliary staffing and administrative overhead

I have seen these programs from the inside. They are not misunderstood. They are structurally inefficient and misaligned with student needs.

Conclusion

STEM Hubs, Outdoor School expansion, and the Oregon TRIO Association represent well-intentioned ideas that have become costly, ineffective systems. Oregon's students do not need more programs. They need teachers, instruction, and time to learn science in their classrooms.

I strongly urge the Legislature to rethink HB 4112, scrutinize existing spending, and redirect funds away from intermediaries and directly into schools and teaching positions, where they will make a real difference.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.