

Submitter: Laura Labarre
On Behalf Of: Duniway Elementary Advocacy Committee
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1555

I'm the parent to a first-grader and rising kindergartner in Portland Public Schools at Duniway Elementary. I am also the Co-Chair of the Duniway Advocacy Committee and a former education policy professional (at the state and federal level) of over 13 years. It is difficult to state how strongly I oppose this bill. As part of my work in education policy, I advised state education agencies (i.e. Departments of Education) on how best to use public funds to both create the best possible learning conditions for students and achieve compliance with federal and state mandates. This bill moves us backwards on both of those accounts. I recall some of my Chief State School Officer (ie state superintendent) clients proposing similar uses of funds back in even more flush economies, and we always counselled them away from it. While understanding what "quality" looks like is important, it is nothing short of a slap in the face to the very real stakeholders in your community (students and their caregivers, educators) to spend public funds on theoretical modeling when proven interventions (like the early literacy program "Reading Results") are being yanked from existing schools due to funding shortfalls (I just learned at last night's PPS Board meeting that we will lose many programs including Reading Results--this program is the reason my first-grader can read and didn't fall catastrophically behind his peers. His brother may need it next year and it won't be there). Oregon already has the QEM, which is admittedly outdated and Oregon likely requires yet more funding to give its kids a quality education. But we can't even manage to properly fund an outdated QEM. The next logical step is simply not to fund a "new" QEM when we continue to fall short. My first-grader's kindergarten class lost a teacher in the first week of school last year, ballooning his class size from 15 to 29 with only one adult. 29 kindergartners to one adult. I just learned last night that his class is going to suffer yet another teaching staff loss next year when they head into second grade. I can only imagine what the class size will be. Using even one penny for theoretical modeling when basics like school meals and early literacy hang in the balance is (and I know its inadvertent) grossly out of touch. Among many things here in Oregon (including our shockingly short school year), I would be deeply embarrassed to share this with my education policy colleagues with whom I'm still frequently touch. While it is the least of our worries when our schools don't even have HVAC or breathable indoor air (per recent studies), I do worry that passing this bill would also contribute to the reputational embarrassment that Oregon is suffering in education circles, which detracts from families' motivation to move to Oregon and stay in Oregon. I urge our legislators to strongly oppose this bill. And please instead fund Oregon schools through commonsense revenue reforms and use of the Education Stability Fund reserves to avoid deeply damaging midyear cuts.