

Opposition to SB 1555

QEM Revision

February 11, 2026

Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

Oregon PTA has publicly stated that we need more alignment across our education system and we need a shared North Star such as the Quality Education Model (QEM) to guide us¹. We've also testified to this legislature multiple times that the Quality Education Commission (QEC) and QEM need to be revised.²

And while we appreciate the efforts by Senator Sollman and Representative Ruiz to move us forward, unfortunately, neither the content of the bill nor the process in which it was developed meet the standards the Legislature should have for itself. A rushed decision that ignores advice from national and Oregon's own experts is not a sound foundation to build major strategies for our education system upon.

In particular we are concerned and argue below that this bill:

- Misses clarity of purpose and misunderstands school funding research
- Lowers expectations for students by reducing them to data points
- Is insufficiently aligned with other efforts and avoids agency accountability
- Rushes through the process without sufficient input from the public and other key voices in public education
- Provides no additional funding, funding stability, or equitable funding distribution

SB 141 passed just months ago arguing that the solution for Oregon's educational crisis is greater state oversight and strengthening the role of ODE vis-a-vis district leadership. In contrast, SB 1555 argues that the crisis is partially caused by ODE and that we should listen to the experts on the ground doing the work in our districts.

This is exactly the kind of legislative policy see-saw whiplash that the State Auditor's Systemic Risk report has warned about and that keeps Oregon at the bottom of national education rankings.

¹ Oregon PTA, "[Oregon has lost sight of what a quality education means](#)", The Oregonian, Aug 17, 2025

² [Testimony JPEAC 2003, SB 5515 \(2004\)](#)

Misses clarity of purpose and misunderstands school funding research

One intent of the bill seems to be to create a cost model **to calculate a specific dollar amount**:

*“Article VIII, Section 8 of the Oregon Constitution requires the Legislative Assembly to appropriate a “sufficient” amount of funding for K-12 education or issue a report about funding insufficiency. That requirement was enacted into law in 2000 with the passage of Ballot Measure 1. To comply with this requirement, the legislature **needs to know how much is sufficient.**”³*

If it is just for the dollar amount, which for years has been a purely academic exercise and we worry will remain so, it could be done both more affordably and more efficiently than the elaborate process that this bill envisions.

Neither the Joint Committee on Public Education Appropriation (JPEA) nor any other legislative committee has - to our knowledge - considered whether the “professional judgement panel (PJP)” approach is even the most appropriate or effective methodology for Oregon for developing the cost estimate required by Article 8 of the constitution.⁴

The other intent speaks to providing a roadmap to improve educational outcomes across Oregon through aligned strategies.

If the goal is to build a real roadmap, it needs a much broader approach. It needs to include more stakeholders. It needs to align with the work of ODE, including its new strategic plan, and the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission. It needs clear alignment with the timelines for setting state goals from SB 141. Finally, it needs to wrestle with how the bottom-up approach of the cost model interacts with the top-down of our funding distribution. All of this takes additional time to get right that is just not available in a short session timeframe.

Arguments made by supporters of SB 1555 are misunderstanding or misrepresenting the scientific research on school funding cost modeling.

This bill takes a wrecking ball to the foundation underlying our education system by eliminating widely supported educational goals from statute. As explained below, this lowers expectations for our students and educators. The elimination of our educational goals in ORS 329.015, and 329.025 also speaks to misconceptions behind this bill. Bill sponsors have argued that the existing goals such as high expectations, safe learning environments and parental involvement can't be used as

³ LPRO staff memo “SB 1555” (Feb 6, 2026)

⁴ Other cost analysis methods for example include: Consultant synthesis (evidence based) resource cost model; Cost-function analysis; Successful Schools Method. See: Baker, Bruce D. “Education Inequality and School Finance - Chapter 9: Applying High-Quality Cost Analysis to School Finance Policy”; AIR “Review and Evaluation of the Efficacy and Methodology of the Quality Education Model- Section 1”

the basis of a cost model. This goes against the American Institutes for Research (AIR) report, which states:

*A key strength of the PJP [professional judgement panel] approach is its ability to accommodate an expansive view of outcome targets, including goals that are not easily quantified. Effective PJP's leverage this opportunity to define adequacy targets using multifaceted aims, which might include student well-being, academic and postsecondary success, and democratic citizenship.*⁵

AIR quoted ORS 329.015 - the very statute which this bill aims to repeal - in full in its report and concluded: "These aims, while broad, would make for useful outcome targets for a PJP in Oregon."

Bill supporters have further argued that the proposed process would link resources and outcomes which is again inconsistent with statements by AIR:

"Whereas being able to accommodate a broader set of goals is a strength, the lack of an explicit empirical link between resources and outcomes is also a weakness of the PJP. With PJP, the link between resources and outcomes is hypothetical [...] There is no guarantee that the planned programs, and associated collections of resources necessary to support them, represent the most efficient way to produce the desired student outcomes."

Lowers expectations for students by reducing them to data points

The current SB 1555 draft would repeal ORS 329.015 and 329.025, which describe the state education goals and general characteristics of the school system.

These goals - which include a safe learning environment, high expectations for all students, and parental involvement among other important goals - represent the foundation and purpose of our educational system. These overarching goals are supported by a vast and bipartisan majority of Oregonians. Eliminating the goal of "parental involvement in the education of their children" from statute is especially incompatible with the mission and values of Oregon PTA.

The goals are ambitious and rightfully so. Parents don't want to claim success when their teenagers are reading at a third-grade level; instead they want them to leave school ready for college, work and the world. Repealing these goals isn't setting high expectations, it's lowering the bar.

These broad educational goals are guardrails to ensure our systems center the best interests of Oregon's students in their work.

⁵ AIR, "Review and Evaluation of the Efficacy and Methodology of the Quality Education Model", pg. 10

One example is the upcoming decision about reinstating the essential skills test for high school graduation. Under the current goals which in ORS 329.015 include:

- “*To equip students with the academic and career skills and information necessary to pursue the future of their choice through a program of rigorous academic preparation and career readiness;*”
- “*To provide an environment that motivates students to pursue serious scholarship and to have experience in applying knowledge and skills and demonstrating achievement;*”

Currently, reinstating an essential skills test seems a logical and aligned decision that can be weighed against other existing state goals.⁶ If “graduation rate” as a metric replaces those broad state goals, then it would be more logical to suspend the “Assessment of Essential Skills” test indefinitely as lifting the suspension would likely decrease graduation rates. Eliminating academic requirements like it lowers the expectations we have for our students. Other states who have used metrics such as grade-level proficiency as goals have often lowered test standards to meet targets leading to an erosion of trust in the public school system.⁷

Oregon PTA believes the current state education goals are important and should not only remain in statute but become guiding principles for all decision-makers and stakeholders to create greater consistency in all our efforts. They should only be updated or modified by a thoughtful, inclusive process.

The broad, ambitious goals, which for the record can and in Oregon are often times already measured,⁸ are necessary to avoid Oregon becoming a “teach to the test state.” Oregonians have a long history of supporting and demanding broad curricula approaches such as mandatory PE minutes, funding for outdoor school and art taxes, or health curricula.

Oregon’s current educational goals acknowledge our students with all their multifaceted hopes and dreams, challenges and needs.

SB 1555 replaces these ambitious, complex goals with simple metrics that seem to value students only as data points that need to be managed, dehumanizing their experiences. Oregon PTA strongly believes in an education system that centers children, not dashboards.

PTA acknowledges that standardized testing has an important place in our education system.⁹ But families also don’t want testing to be the only lens that we look through when we design educational systems and experiences.

⁶ It is PTA’s position that “neither one test, nor a single data point should ever be the sole determinant of a student’s academic or work future, such as graduation, admission, retention or tracking.”

⁷ As the adage goes: “Metrics that become goals become useless as metrics.”

⁸ https://www.oregonpta.org/assets/pages/files/Metrics_for_Oregon_K-12_Education_Goals_Crosswalk.pdf

⁹ <https://www.pta.org/home/advocacy/ptas-positions/PTA-Positions-Standards-Assessments>

Focuses on averages, once again marginalizing disadvantaged students

The current draft only considers statewide averages for the narrowly defined goals of “quality education” such as 3rd grade reading, attendance, or graduation rates taken from SB 141. We know from decades of education research that a focus on averages leaves our marginalized students - students with disabilities, students of color, rural students, students experiencing poverty, English Learners - behind. We need to ensure that our education system serves not just the average, but all students.

Families and communities deserve schools that serve the needs of every student and their diverse needs are represented in discussions around educational strategies and funding. State goals can either open or close the door on these important community conversations, so it is imperative that we are intentional about including student subgroups.

Is insufficiently aligned with other efforts and avoids agency accountability

The Oregon State Board of Education is currently in the process of adopting statewide targets for 2030 for the metrics identified in SB 1555. Given SB 1555’s timeline of presenting a new cost model for the first time for the 2029-31 biennium, this would give districts about one year of full funding - if the legislature were to fully fund the new QEM, which seems highly unlikely itself - to achieve potentially ambitious state goals or be taken over by the Department of Education - which, ironically, this bill seems to suggest we can’t trust to get cost calculations or educational strategies right.

In the more likely case of the Legislature not funding districts to the level of new QEM before 2030, why would we hold districts accountable and use authority from SB 141 to have ODE take them over, when evidence-based research from this process has shown that the targets were impossible to achieve in the first place given funding constraints?

The educational goals in SB 1555 also seem out of sync with the goals of the strategic plan ODE is developing and it raises the question as to why those efforts weren’t coordinated more.

Lastly, it has not been addressed how this process will incorporate costs resulting from new legislative mandates or ODE and other agency rule-making especially in the time between the publication of the cost estimate (February of even numbered years) and budget adoption (June of odd numbered years).

The 2025 JPEA committee exposed great flaws in the way ODE is currently calculating the QEM and potential insufficiency of state funding.¹⁰ Neither the JPEA nor the relevant Joint Subcommittee on Education - both co-chaired by Senator Sollman and Representative Ruiz - have held hearings with the Department of Education to investigate why the QEM report was prepared so haphazardly and which consequences the Department has drawn from it.

Instead of addressing the issue with ODE, SB 1555 avoids accountability for the agency. Without clear communication and a clear alignment between the Legislature and ODE, any efforts to improve our education system are destined to be stymied. **SB 141 (2025) gives great powers to the Department of Education to take over districts. If we can't trust ODE to properly calculate the purely theoretical QEM, why would we trust ODE with running actual districts?**

Additionally, it should be noted that LFO, who will be instrumental in the implementation of SB 1555, did not spot ODEs two billion dollar mistake for months and only realized it after the 2025-27 budget had been passed.

Neither JPEA nor the Joint Subcommittee on Education have held hearings to hold LFO accountable.

Rushes through the process without sufficient input from the public and other key voices in public education

Bill sponsors have argued this bill requires immediate passage in order to be able to have an updated model in time that can provide input for the 2029 biennium.¹¹ This time pressure is artificially created by timelines in the bill itself. The bill assumes a contractor would require at least 18 months to develop the report and model and the bill further requires the report/model to be presented Feb 1 of even numbered years. About 11 months before the start of a legislative long session and about 18 months before the cost number is needed for the report required by Article 8 of the constitution. **The bill sponsors have offered no testimony or evidence that would support these long (29-36 months), self-chosen timelines.**

¹⁰ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025l1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/310915>

¹¹ It is worth highlighting that this issue could have been addressed in the 2025 session. In fact, Oregon PTA testified to the Joint Subcommittee on Education in March of 2025 (11 months ago) and urged to *“provide additional resources and staffing to the Quality Education Commission. This support will enable the study of best practices for statewide implementation, the refinement of the quality education model with a broader range of student outcomes and more detailed financial data, and the development of a realistic plan to achieve much-needed improvements in student outcomes.”* The co-chairs of the Joint Subcommittee on Education did not respond to our testimony nor did they propose budget adjustments or budget notes to improve the work of the Quality Education Commission in 2025. The co-chairs of this subcommittee in 2025 were: Senator Janeen Sollman, Representative Ricki Ruiz.

The long timelines also raise questions about the timeliness of the financial data underlying the model. The most current available financial data for districts as of February 2026 is from the 2023-24 school year, that means for the first report to be published in February 2028 the most recent data will be the current 2025-26 school year and that assumes that there is sufficient time between the publication of the financial data by ODE (typically in November) and the publication of the report (in February) to run the model again based on the most recent data, otherwise **the 2029-31 QEM cost estimate stemming from SB 1555 might be informed by 2024-25 financial data which would likely be unrepresentative for 2029-31 costs.** ODE's update to the Program Budgeting and Accounting Manual (PBAM) used statewide by districts currently in progress will further complicate our ability to develop the cost comparisons and trends over time necessary for the cost model.

The AIR report, which could be considered of similar complexity, was written in about 9 months. Current QEM reports are seemingly written within 18 months and published in August before the long session - six months later than what SB 1555 proposes.

Overall, the bill was developed without sufficient public input. Breaking with tradition, the 2025 JPEA co-chairs decided to not hold a public hearing to discuss the committee's draft report, giving no opportunity to the public to weigh in on the report or the conclusions presented in it.

At the February 10, 2026, Senate Education Committee hearing, supporters of the bill including staff were given close to an hour of testimony time and all five witnesses registered in support were called by the chair for testimony, while only three out of five witnesses opposed to the bill were called. The three witnesses in opposition spoke for less than 20 minutes and were denied by the chair to fully respond to a question raised to them by Senator Sollman due to limited time. Yet later in the same meeting, prompted by Senator Sollman, the chair agreed to call additional testimony from staff in support of the bill.

At the same committee meeting, a bill sponsor was corrected on the record about misrepresenting stakeholder engagement.

This raises questions about the inclusiveness and fairness of the process and whether it allows for sufficient vetting of this bill. As can be seen in submitted testimony, other stakeholders have raised these concerns as well.

Provides no additional funding, funding stability or equitable funding distribution

Finally, the current budgetary situation provides another reason that there is limited benefit to rushing this bill. Given the challenging revenue outlook for the next two biennia we can't even be sure we will be able to maintain CSL funding for schools, so developing this new QEM exercise feels particularly unnecessary.

We agree with the bill sponsors that schools need adequate and stable funding. This was also the goal of the original QEM. A goal that was never met.

Despite the sponsors' best intent: **This bill provides neither funding nor funding stability. It does not address our current inequitable funding distribution.**

Submitted:

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