



ANDREA CASTAÑEDA, Superintendent  
2450 Lancaster Drive NE • PO Box 12024  
Salem, Oregon 97309-0024  
503-399-3001

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Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am Andrea Castañeda, and I am the superintendent of Salem-Keizer Public Schools, Oregon's most diverse, poverty-dense large district in Oregon. I am submitting the following testimony related to Senate Bill 1555 related to the QEM and the calculation and distribution of school funding in Oregon. I regret that I was unable to testify in-person, but managing a \$23M budget reduction (accumulating to almost \$100M in reductions over three years) is absorbing nearly all my time.

I want to first thank the bill sponsors Senator Sollman and Representative Ruiz for bringing forth a bold solution to the systemic problem. Oregon's funding formula and the calculation systems upon which the formula are less a system than a collection of free-standing initiatives, urgently applied patches, and concepts that have outlived their practical life. If Oregon's method for funding schools was a board game, it would a Jenga column sitting on an uneven surface with 1/3 of the blocks missing.

I offer my comments on behalf of Salem-Keizer, but I deign to speak for districts with high concentrations of poverty, special education needs, and English language learners. The current QEM, coupled with grave flaws in the distribution formula, create a school resourcing system that is largely indifferent to community context. SB 1555 introduces the concept of school prototypes that could better reflect the range of conditions in which Oregon schools operate. Salem-Keizer's schools are not the same as Beaverton's schools. Beaverton's schools are not the same as Redmond's schools. But in the QEM, we are all virtually identical.

I would also like to advocate for the concept of third-party research and design *coupled* with local practitioner input. The legislature viewed Oregon's K-12 funding formula worthy of a high-quality third-party evaluation when it commissioned the 2025 study by AIR. It seems both responsible and logical that work to address systemic flaws deserves the same national credibility, rigor, and depth of policy experience. Our schools deserve the best thinking and deepest experience available to design and develop the next generation of education funding policy in Oregon.

Our school funding policy challenges are systemic, and I strongly support bold action that offers systemic solutions. Patchwork solution cause us to stagger from one biennium to the next, and while they solve urgent problems, are not serving the long-term needs of our students, our districts, or our state.

Thank you,

/s/

Andrea Castañeda  
Superintendent