Susan Barrett
Oregon Education Investment Board Testimony, February 7, 2012

I am Susan Barrett. I am a parent of two children in Portland Public Schools, a co-founder of Oregon Save Our Schools, and I work in informal science education. I do want to point out that I am a working parent who had to do some finagling to be here today. It is incredibly difficult for working parents to attend these meetings. Even for our unemployed parents, despite the value they place on their children's education, attending these forums is not easy when you may be concerned about finding a job or keeping a roof over your head. This is very important to bear in mind as it is OUR CHILDREN your plans will be affecting. The plans developed here also have huge impacts on our state's educators, yet they also cannot attend these meetings as they are busy teaching. When I went to one of the public forums, all I heard from the public was a sense of frustration over these plans. Yet, the state is moving full-steam ahead and ignoring the most important stakeholders in public education – the students, parents, and teachers.

On page 77 of the NCLB waiver that the state submitted well in advance of its due date and before public forums were done, you refer to the writings of Michael Fullan and his book *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Full System Reform*, and state that "the key to system-wide success is to situate the energy of educators and students as the central driving force." Students and educators are NOT the central driving force of these plans, nor are parents.

What I have heard over and over again from the true stakeholders in our public schools is that they want to move away from a focus on high-stakes testing, they want access to well-rounded opportunities and smaller class sizes, and real reforms that close the achievement and opportunity gaps. Not only would following those recommendations get to "aligning the goals for reform with the intrinsic motivation of participants" as Fullan also suggests, but this just makes sense.

Reducing class sizes is not only a common sense reform, but one that has been shown over and over again to work in reducing the achievement gap. I included research in my attachments for you to review. While there is significant research that proves this, again, it is just common sense. It we want to meet the needs of all our diverse learners, we need to create the conditions that allow educators to do this.

However, focusing on class size is an "input" and not one our 14 ALEC legislators who have been pushing for "outcomes based budgeting" in their *Budget Reform Toolkit* will care to acknowledge. Other inputs, such as school counselors, programs for our English Language Learners and students with special education needs, culturally relevant curriculum, access to shop classes, a wide range of arts, libraries, sports and more, that keep students engaged and wanting to stay in school, are also inputs that should not be ignored. These will get us to the actual outcome of more students graduating and prepared for the 21st century.

According to *Test, Punish, and Push Out*, a report by the Advancement Project, the use of high-stakes tests and the severity of the consequences attached to them (in this case school funding) lead to a rapidly dwindling set of opportunities for students who do not score well on these exams. This approach has had a devastating effect on the quality of education being offered at many schools. Because of the important decisions based on these tests, many schools have been turned into test-prep factories, with narrowed and weakened curricula often dominated by rote memorization exercises, and "teaching to the test." This has suffocated high-quality instruction, and made it more difficult than ever for teachers to engage students and create authentic and sustained learning. This approach to accountability has created an education system that increasingly turns students off to learning and teachers off to teaching.

This is the wrong direction for Oregon, unfortunately promoted in "Achievement Compacts." We need to change this. Thank you.

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Research on Class Size:

Spyros Konstantopoulos and Vicki Chun, **"What Are the Long-Term Effects of Small Classes on the Achievement Gap? Evidence from the Lasting Benefits Study,"** American Journal of Education 116, November 2009. *A summary of the effects of smaller classes on the achievement gap through eighth grade. Effects significant in all tested subjects, and for those in smaller classes for four years, very substantial. "The results f… provided convincing evidence that all types of students (e.g., low, medium, and high achievers) benefit from being in small classes (in early grades) across all achievement tests…. in certain grades, in reading and science, the cumulative effects of small classes for low achievers are substantial in magnitude and significantly different from those for high achievers. Thus, class size reduction appears to be an intervention that increases the achievement levels for all students while simultaneously reducing the achievement gap."*

Peter Blatchford et.al. **"*D*o low attaining and younger students benefit most from small classes? Results from a systematic observation study of class size effects on pupil classroom engagement and teacher pupil interaction,"** paper delivered to the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting 2008: P*aper showing that there is no threshold effect in terms of class size reduction yielding benefits; show gains for middle school students from smaller classes, which "can benefit all pupils in terms of individual, active attention from teachers, but that the lower attaining pupils in particular can benefit from small classes at secondary level."*

Thomas Dee and Martin West, **"The Non-Cognitive Returns to Class Size, "** NBER Working Paper 13994, 2008**.** *"Our results indicate that smaller classes in 8th grade lead to improvements in measures of student engagement ….Using the estimated earnings impact of these non-cognitive skills and the direct cost of a class-size reduction, the implied internal rate of return from an 8th-grade class-size reduction is 4.6 percent overall, but 7.9 percent in urban schools."*

Alan B. Krueger, **Economic Considerations and Class Size,** The Economic Journal, 113 (February 2003). *One of the most important contributions to the literature on class size, and an authoritative critique of Hanushek's work.*

Jeremy D. Finn et.al., **"Small Classes in the Early Grades, Academic Achievement, and Graduating From High School,"** Journal of Educational Psychology, 2005.

Alan B. Krueger and Diane M. Whitmore, **"Would Smaller Classes Help Close the Black-White Achievement Gap?"** from :Bridging the Achievement Gap, Brookings Institution Press 2002.