May 22, 2012

Dear Oregon Education Investment Board,

I am writing to urge you to work with the legislature to solve the funding crisis facing our K-12 schools across Oregon. Oregon schools are indeed in crisis. Over the past nine years K-12 education's share of Oregon's budget has dropped nearly 6%. We are providing fewer resources for our students and teachers while high stakes tests are demanding more and more and draining critical financial resources from the system.

I ask you - if you were raising elephants would you choose to weigh them constantly rather than feed them? That's what we are doing with our students, measuring too much and feeding too little. We already have one of the shortest school years in the nation. More testing leaves even less time for instruction. I don't mean to say that assessment and accountability are not important. They are key to any semblance of quality education. However, we are now drastically over-weighing and under-feeding our students. The strength of our schools is wasting away due to lack of a secure, stable, and adequate source of funding as well as misguided use of increasingly limited resources to meet requirements of unfunded mandates from the federal government.

I know you share my belief that a quality public education system is a cornerstone of a thriving community and strong democracy. Our state motto is "She flies on her own wings". I fear if we do not solve the funding crisis for schools NOW our state will forever be grounded. Langston Hughes wrote, "Hold fast to dreams for if dreams die life is a broken-winged bird who cannot fly". We must dream and act now to make our dreams of quality education for all Oregonians a reality. We can and we must soar above partisanship for the sake of our dreams, our children's dreams, and for the future of Oregon.

How to solve this crisis? Leaders must address the difficult issues of PERS reform and revenue reform. These issues are long overdue for solution-oriented discussions with all concerned parties across the state. One place to start these important discussions should be the Oregon Education Investment Board. I support the mission of OEIB to "create a seamless, unified system for investing in and delivering public education from early childhood through high school and college so that all Oregonians are well prepared for careers in our economy" (from State of Oregon's website.) However, I strongly recommend more time be spent on the "INVESTMENT" part of OEIB's title in order to make the mission a reality. The first charge of the OEIB as listed on the State of Oregon website is "developing an **education investment strategy** to improve defined learning outcomes from early childhood through public schools, colleges and universities." There are some great minds at work on this board but we need to see more attention to PERS and revenue reform from OEIB in order to make the Quality Education Model a reality for all of Oregon's public school children.

Thank you for your time and attention given to solving the funding crisis for K-12 schools. I expect my elected leaders and members of the OEIB to lead the way on this critical issue and will be paying attention to your efforts. For my part, I vow to stay informed and support serious efforts to solve the funding crisis for schools and will encourage other citizens to do the same.

Respectfully,

Grace Groom
Mother of a kindergartener at Roseway Heights School, Portland, Oregon

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