Testimony to the OEIB board meeting of July 10, 2012

Dear Members of the OEIB Board, Governor Kitzhaber, and Rudy Crew,

I want you to think about your own children, grandchildren, and yourself for a minute, and then describe or list what kinds of things you think are important with regards to a getting a good education. What does a good education look like to you?

For me, a parent of a 4th and 6th grader who attend their neighborhood public school, this doesn't take much thought: a caring and professional teacher, a well-rounded education to include not only the basics, but also PE, music, art, drama, home economics, foreign languages, wood shop and industrial arts, journalism, sports, library media and technology access, field trips, hands-on learning, collaborative learning, integrated curriculum, higher level critical thinking, smaller class sizes, teacher-created assessments, and no high stakes testing. I had all of these things in my public education experience growing up in Coos Bay, Oregon, and I want them all for my children too.

Furthermore, as a public school teacher of 13 years both as a library media specialist and now a language arts teacher, I can tell you that I want my students to have the kind of education I had: well -funded, well-rounded, and solid. Sadly, this is quickly disappearing. I never doubted that Oregon was progressive in its public education system, until recently. Never in a million years did I think that the state that championed the Beach Bill and the Bottle Bill would sell out its public education system. Yes, sell out.

I have been following the trends of public education reform closely for the last three years, and never dreamed that Oregon would blindly follow suit. I thought for sure, that the innovative and progressive state of Oregon would see through the carefully crafted words and blackmail of No Child Left Behind, the NCLB waiver, and all the corporate education reform speak pushed by so-called "grassroots" education reform groups such as Stand for Children. I truly thought we were smarter than that.

The creation of the OEIB, the loss of an elected Superintendent of Education to that of an appointed post, Achievement Compacts, outcome based budgeting, new laws on teacher evaluations, dependence on test scores to determine student success, labeling of schools, increase in acquiring and assessing student data, cutting of valuable programs, closing schools, cutting instructional days, teacher union strikes--while at the same time failing to fund our public schools to a quality level--all of this is set to destroy, absolutely destroy, our state's public education system rather than support success. There are other ways to educate our children.

Rather than follow a business model, we should be looking to models like that of Finland. Finland's top goal is to provide equity with regards to education in their country. Their other goals include fostering curiosity and collaboration, treating

teachers as respected professionals, small class sizes, well-rounded curriculum, recess, hands on learning, wrap around services, no standardized testing--and they fund education. Ironically, while reading the book Finnish Lessons, I realized that Finland was doing a lot of what the U.S. did prior to NCLB with regards to education philosophy. Which reinforces the idea that we are heading down the wrong path.

What I propose we do in Oregon instead is this: slow down, discuss with parents, teachers, and students what a well-rounded and quality education looks like—look to the Quality Education Model—and then figure out how to guarantee every school and student in this state has equity in their public education opportunities—and then fund it.

I fail to see equity being a concern in the current model being proposed. A child in Coos Bay should have access to music, PE, library media specialists as much as a child in Lake Oswego. A child in Klamath Falls should have access to field trips and hands on science as much as a child in Corbett. A child in Troutdale should have small class sizes like that in Riverdale. And so on. Equity. To do that requires vision for a quality and well-rounded education for all and of course, funding. Those should be our priorities. Instead, all I see is more bureaucratic red tape that pushes a corporate education reform agenda and ignores the voices of the teachers, parents, and students who have to live with your decisions every day.

We aren't being innovative with our education reform; we are being followers of a fast moving corporate model which will co-opt our public education system. We can, and should do better than that in Oregon. We need to take care of our own and invest in our families and students by really looking at a different model. This is what Finland did and they have had incredible success. There is still time to review our education reform model and see how we can incorporate more of the Finland approach in order to provide equity and quality to each and every child in the state of Oregon.

Isn't that what you would want for your own children?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
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