Testimony to the Oregon Education Investment Board
Presented by
Oregon Save Our Schools

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(Footnotes indicated in bold parentheses)

Introduction

We appreciate the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of Oregon Save Our Schools. We are a rapidly growing grass roots organization that advocates for better public education for our children and youth.. We are all unpaid volunteers—parents and grandparents, educators and people from the private sector. We accept money from no one for our advocacy work.

You may wonder why Oregon Save Our Schools has been such a regular observer of your work. Let me be candid with our reasons. We have deep concerns with both the substance and the process of developing state education policies over the past two years.

The Substance of Proposals for Education Reform.

Policy dialogue at the state level has leapfrogged over any deep discussion about the broad purposes of public education in our society. You have ceded control of this dialogue to those whose sole concern is workforce development. Where is the discussion about developing our students as individuals with a zest for life? Good family members? Good neighbors? Good and thoughtful citizens?

You have been rushed to adopt recommendations through a flawed process that rests on flawed assumptions about effective drivers for reform **(1).** The recommendations you have been presented for so-called "proficiency based learning" and "outcomes based funding"**(2)** have not been subjected to any careful analysis or scrutiny regarding their feasibility and necessary statewide capacity building costs to scale them up.

In spite of the continuing decline in the level of state support, coupled with escalating levels of poverty in our schools, you have apparently assumed that we can simply turn reform over to technocrats who promise to create a top-down standardized, testing and technology-driven education system. Of course, that system will also ensure huge profits for private education vendors. But it will not result in more innovative workers—let alone good family members, neighbors and citizens.

In all the consultant-driven recommendations produced for you, fostering children's critical thinking, creativity and true joy for learning through a well-rounded education has rarely been mentioned. Instead, we hear endless esoteric discussions about:

- projecting trajectories
- more integrated data systems;
- return on investment
- schools defined as 'delivery entities' and 'bidders' for state funding
- standardized, vetted formative assessments
- immersing participants in the disciplines and mindset of outcome budgeting
- meta-analyses of linkages between P20 investments and earnings

Your Policy Actions So Far

So now your two most highly visible actions have been:

1. You unanimously approved a new legislative accountability mandate requiring achievement compacts. In the face of shriveling budgets, our K-12 districts now have the added task of measuring and reporting about 100 different performance targets mandated by the state. Less support and more measurement does not make for sound policy. **(3)**
2. Oregon's proposal to the U.S. Department of Education seeks a waiver from a few No Child Left Behind requirements. Oregon promises to satisfy the federal government's demands by increasing the stakes on standardized tests, allowing for interventions that create opportunities to for-profit education companies, and encourages school closures and governance changes. Nowhere have we heard a due diligence cost-benefit analysis of these kinds of promises Our own State Department of Education says implementing the waiver request will have a $116 million price tag over the next two years (almost all of that cost imposed on local districts' strained budgets). **(4)** That estimate does not include the millions we continue to spend to erode instructional time for unproductive testing and test preparation! Nor does it adequately calculate the dangers to human privacy provoked by the desire for ever-more sharing of individual data such as in the Alder project.

How has Oregon education policy come to this? The process for developing recommendations has simply been centralized and non-transparent, and has not seriously engaged the public.

Unprecedented Processes of Centralization and Lack of Transparency

Senate Bill 909 authorized unprecedented centralized state control over public education. The Governor appointed an Education Investment Team. He employed an Education Policy Advisor and Deputy Advisor. The Oregon Business Association loaned a lobbyist to this effort. You were appointed to oversee this centralization. The Governor employed an Investment Board Manager and several additional staff members. He and you have now employed

a Chief Education Officer to oversee of all levels of education. Apparently, a Deputy Superintendent will also soon be employed to oversee K-12 education.

The Oregon Commission on Children and Family Services has now been wiped out. The local commissions will be wiped out over the next year---all to be replaced by your more centralized Early Learning Council.

Our conservative estimate is well over $1 million has now already been spent in staffing and consultant costs to run this unprecedented centralization effort.

In the face of this centralization, we have also witnessed a lack of transparency in the development of policy proposals. This began with the Education Investment Team's work last year.

In its final meeting in August, theTeam heard a set of findings and recommendations from a private group called "LearnWorks.". That group had been funded by the Oregon Business Council with grants from a variety of foundations, including special interest private corporate foundations.

We also discovered the LearnWorks' recommendations were essentially a carbon copy of work the Oregon Business Council and its subsidiary, Employers for Education Excellence, had already earlier produced in 2008-10 with funding from private Gates Foundation and other grants. **(5)**

The Governor's Investment Team never took a vote on anything, including the LearnWorks recommendations. And they never provided the opportunity for public testimony at any of their meetings.

We testified at your first Board meeting last November. Since the only recommendations you had at that point were from the privately-sponsored LearnWorks effort, we encouraged you to conduct a year-long vigorous statewide public dialogue about the future of Oregon public education. The answer to that request was a few quickly-called public forums that were held in January 2012. There's no evidence that these forums had any significant impact on your subsequent education policy actions. You missed a powerful opportunity to ask local parents, educators and their elected school boards to join in a conversation about their schools' aspirations, needs and challenges. Instead you rushed forward.

Looking Ahead

As you enter your next several months of deliberations, Outcomes Based Budgeting will become your pre-occupation. The recommendations you receive will be developed under still ANOTHER secret process, the work of an "Education Funding Team." The Salem Statesman-Journal reported in its June 9 editorial that these meetings will not be open to the public. We agree with the paper. They should be open to the public. What is there to hide?

Before engaging in this work, we ask you to seriously consider these facts:

- The new process of so-called "outcomes based budgeting" has never been successfully implemented by any state.
- Some of the same consultants commissioned to produce the earlier Oregon Business Council's Gates grant work and the private LearnWorks recommendations now have a contract with the Governor's Office to run the secret "Education Funding Team" meetings and to write the recommendations. The master contract authorizes consultant charges up to $300 per hour and total expenditures up to $225,000. **(6)**
- Only a tiny portion of the contractor's proposed 2,100 hours of contract work will be engaged to seek real public input. The contract simply promises to interview "24 stakeholders" at the end of the process. Your Education Funding Team will meet outside the view of the public? And at the end, the grand sum of only 24 stakeholders will be polled? **(7)**

Our Recommendations

Oregon's 560,000 school children and youth cannot afford another year waiting in intolerable class sizes while technocrats continue their quest for more elegant "models" and "projections of trajectories." In the interest of our children's future, here is what we ask of you.

1. Convince the legislature to take steps in this next session to begin securing adequate and equitable funding for a quality public education. Ask them to eliminate, over time, the QEM's defined current $3 billion funding gap. To those who say it can't be done, ask them to consider the newest national study of school funding by the Rutgers University Education Law Center. **(8)** Oregon received a grade of "F". based on an analysis of the relationship between our state's economic productivity and our low level of funding for education..

2. Reject the increasingly corporate-dominated efforts to lobby for more testing, technology, data gathering, privatizing and teacher-bashing --- simply to make the system "more efficient."

3. Declare a moratorium on using test scores to make any high stakes decisions such as school or teacher evaluation, school or district labeling or funding. Take steps to minimize the negative aspects of testing which narrows the curriculum and promotes teaching to the test.

4. Take concrete action to increase state support to expand "wrap around" health and social service programs designed to help children and their families remove poverty's barriers to learning.

5. Abandon your top-down Achievement Compact strategy. Make a clear policy commitment to local control and seek the citizens' "voice." School problems are best solved by local citizens. Smart "tight/loose" state education policies will only emerge from unprecedented engagement of our citizens---not from technocrats building more untried models in the back room.

6. Loudly lobby the federal government to end:

- high stakes testing,
- competition for school funding,
- programs which profit corporations instead of children,
- the attack on teachers, and
- federal efforts to make schools uniform such as the Common Core.

Source Document Footnotes

(1) Michael Fullan, Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform. Centre for Strategic Education: Seminar Series Paper #205, April 2011.

(2) LearnWorks: Findings and Recommendations, August 2011; Oregon Learns: The Strategy to Get to 40/40/20. August 2011.

(3) Fullan. Ibid; M. Mourshed, .C. Chinezi, and M. Barber How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better, McKinsey and Company. London (2010).

(4) Oregon Department of Education, Oregon ESEA Waiver Request—Cost Estimate Summary. 2012

(5) These policy reports can be accessed at Oregon Business Council's "Employers for Education Excellence" web site http://www.orbusinesscouncil.org/ click on "Policy Papers"

Proficiency-Based Instruction and Assessment: *A Promising Path to Higher Achievement in Oregon Education*
Oregon Education Roundtable, March 2009

Defining Practice, Informing Policy: *Practitioner Networks Voice a Call to Action, Oregon Proficiency Project - Phase 2*
Oregon Business Council and E3: Employers for Education Excellence, December 2010

Defining Practice, Informing Policy: *Oregon Proficiency Project - Phase 1*
Oregon Business Council and E3: Employers for Education Excellence, June 2010

Oregon's Prek-20 Education Enterprise: Rethinking the Budget Framework
ECONorthwest. June, 2007

(6) State of Oregon Master Contract 107-2831-11, Enterprise Initiative Implementation Consulting Services; Work Order Contract 107-1097-12, Outcomes-Focused P-20 Governor's Recommended Budget 2013-2015

(7)State of Oregon Work Order Contract #107-1097-12, Outcomes-Focused P-20 Governor's Recommended Budget 2013-2015 (contractor hours of effort summarized in Exhibit #3.)

(8) Bruce Baker, David Sciarra, Danielle Farrie, Is School Funding Fair? Second Edition, 2012. Rutgers University Education Law Center, Newark, NJ (June 2012).

FACT SHEET

INVESTING IN OREGON' S PUBLIC EDUCATION?

- Oregon has lost almost 16% of our teachers, teaching assistants, and school maintenance and clerical workers over the past three years.
- Our high school class sizes have soared class by 28.6% (Do you think students get individual attention when physics classes have 45 kids?)
- Elementary class sizes have increased by more than 19%. (Do we really think thirty or more kiindergartners in a class meets their needs?)
- In aggregate, our school districts cut 287 school days in the current school year. (Try helping struggling kids with 15 fewer learning days!). The aggregate over the past three years amounts to 951 lost days for learning!
- Oregon's per student spending has declined from 15th in the nation in 1997-98 to 37rd in 2008-2009.
- Oregon's education funding received a grade of "F" in a new national study that examined Oregon's GDP value and the relatively low level of effort for funding public education.
- K-12 schools' share of Oregon's state budget has dropped from 44% in 2003-2005 to 39% in 2011-2013
- Since 2003, Public Education has received less than one-third of the percentage increase that went to public safety. . We spend more on prisons than education.
- According to the legislature's own Quality Education Commission research, the state is currently $3 billion short of what it takes to provide K-12 quality education.
- The last five years saw a 5% reduction in spending on K-12 schools. Yet, the state's totaltax breaks grew by 12%. These breaks amount to over $26 billion, while funding for K-12 schools has shrunk to current level of $5.6 billion.
- The number of Oregon children living in poverty continues to escalate, and these children have special health and learning needs. The state's response? Ignore this reality and push harder on our educators as the sole "solution." This is a travesty that prevents improved achievement across the state.

Compiled by
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Data Sources: State of Oregon Tax Expenditure Reports; Oregon Legislative Fiscal Office; Our Oregon; Oregon Education Association Survey of Cut Days; COSA/OASBO School Budget Surveys, Sept. 2009, 2010 and 2011; Education Law Center Rutgers University..