

OSBA Legislative Highlights



the Promise
OF OREGON

April 3, 2015

OSBA Action Alert: Urge Senate “No” vote on State School Fund

Oregon schools and students need your help!

As far as we have trekked in the last two months on school funding, we are still not there yet.

Now – today and over the next few days – Oregon’s students need you to once again raise your voices on their behalf. Next week, as early as Monday, the state Senate will consider **House Bill 5017** which provides \$7.25 billion for the State School Fund over the next two years.

School business managers, administrators, teachers and board members across the state agree that this amount will lead once again to layoffs and lost school days. **We cannot stand by while we mortgage our children’s future.**

Please contact your state senator today

(www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html) to urge a “no” vote on **HB 5017, the school funding bill**. Together we need to find a way to fund schools at a minimum of \$7.5 billion to hold even, and ideally even more so we can add school days, reduce class sizes and provide the services that our children deserve.

Already, more than 6,300 of you have signed a petition (promiseoregon.org/petition) on “The Promise of Oregon” website (www.promiseoregon.org) urging lawmakers to fully fund Oregon’s schools. For that, thanks! And if you haven’t signed it yet, please do so now.

Most importantly, please join us in making sure that Oregon senators know that our future is at stake on this vote. Urge them to vote “no” on HB 5017 so that the more than 570,000 Oregon students in grades kindergarten through 12 can reach their maximum potential. The current bill does not make the investment necessary for a quality education for every student.

We can do much better, and we must. Our children and their education should be our first priority. We need to keep our promise to them.

Contact Morgan Allen (mallen@osba.org), legislative services specialist, for information on HB 5017.

View HB 5017:

www.osba.org/Resources/Article/Legislative/BillTracking.aspx?s=15&t=&r=&q=hb 5017&c=50&key=HB 50170&ptadd=: HB 5017 Details

House passes \$7.25 billion K-12 budget

On March 31, the Oregon House of Representatives voted 35-25 to pass a State School Fund budget of \$7.25 billion for the 2015-17 biennium; all 35 Democrats voted in favor while all 25 Republicans voted no. The Senate will take up the bill as early as next Monday, April 6. If approved, it would be the earliest the K-12 budget has passed both chambers since the state took over responsibility for funding schools after Measure 5; the K-12 budget is typically one of the last budgets to pass.

While it is clearly not a budget level school board members and other K-12 advocates support, it is important to note that in the over two hours of debate about the budget, many legislators referenced all of the calls and emails they have been receiving from their constituent school community. The pressure is clearly building to find more money for K-12, even among legislators who voted for this budget. Members of the Democratic majority also gave a commitment to push 40 percent of any new revenue from the May state revenue forecast to K-12 and to look for other ways to raise K-12 funding; this budget level was often referenced as a “floor” by Democratic legislators.

Do not be disenchanted by this vote. Those of us in the Capitol on a daily basis can see and hear the impact that your advocacy is having on legislators. We are only half-way through the session and we have more than three months left to go. We can make progress if we continue to work together with our partners at the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, the Oregon Education Association, the Oregon School Employees Association, the Oregon Small Schools Association, the Oregon Association of Education Service Districts, the Oregon Association of School Business Officials and the Oregon PTA. We are united in our opposition to this budget and continue to advocate as a coalition to increase K-12 funding.

Our message is starting to get through. OSBA’s opposition to the budget was reported in *The Oregonian* newspaper story about the vote: “...leaders of the Oregon School Boards Association have made it clear that getting more money – at least \$7.5 billion – is more important than early certainty about getting less.” You can read the whole article here:

www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2015/03/house_approves_7255_billion_fo.html#incart_river

The most important thing you can do as school board members is to continue to advocate and talk to your legislators. Coordinate efforts with other K-12 supporters in your community. Keep the messages respectful, but tell the story about how this budget will impact the students and schools in your community. Remember that the original K-12 budget proposal in 2013-15 was \$6.15 billion and we were able to persuade the Legislature to increase its investment to \$6.65 billion. And, we have already helped increase the proposed K-12 budget from former Governor John Kitzhaber's initial \$6.9 billion level to the Legislature's current \$7.25 billion level. Working together, we can get this done.

We appreciate your continued advocacy. Watch for OSBA "action alerts" for key times to contact your legislator. And, please contact your OSBA legislative team if you need any assistance reaching out to your legislators.

Contact Morgan Allen (mallen@osba.org), legislative services specialist, for more information about the State School Fund budget.



Show your support for fully funding Oregon's public schools -
Sign the petition!

Unemployment bill receives Senate hearing

On April 1, the Senate Workforce Committee held a public hearing on **Senate Bill 470**. This bill, proposed by the Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA), would make a significant change in policy to the unemployment benefits for non-instructional workers in school districts and community colleges.

The bill repeals ORS 657.221, which is the statute that defines who is ineligible for benefits within certain educational institutions.

OSEA lobbyist Tricia Smith testified in support of the bill saying, "SB 470 was requested to address the crisis these members and their families face when they are laid off and without income for months each year because their employers have shut their doors between academic years."

"The Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, administered by the Oregon Employment Department, provides benefits to employees who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. Currently, under Oregon law, school employees who perform services other than instruction, research or administration do not qualify for UI benefits during school breaks. Senate Bill 470 repeals the law preventing these employees from receiving UI benefits during school breaks," Smith said.

David Gerstenfeld, assistant director for Unemployment Insurance, described to the committee the history of the Unemployment Insurance program beginning at the federal level, citing a change by the Federal government, which gave authority to each state to determine unemployment benefits for non-instructional employees, now contained in ORS 657.221. Gerstenfeld went on to explain how the current programs work, what changes SB 470 would have on the employment department and how the department would handle potentially 30,000 new eligible employees who would have access to unemployment benefits.

Gerstenfeld shared with the committee some rough fiscal estimates, based on a potential 30,000 eligible employees with 50 percent of those eligible applying for benefits, which totaled an estimated \$66.8 million per year as the cost to employers.

Oregon School Boards Association Legislative Specialist Lori Sattenspiel testified in opposition to SB 470, citing the huge cost increases for school districts if all the eligible non-instructional employees were to now be eligible for unemployment benefits during the summer and holiday breaks.

"Non-instructional staff are an integral part of the district and are valued employees. These employees perform valuable services for the students in our districts. But these employees who work in these jobs take these jobs knowing they won't work during the summer and holiday breaks and have 'assurances' for returning to work at the school district in the fall," Sattenspiel said.

Community colleges are also impacted by the bill and weighed in with opposition. One community college estimates its costs would increase by more than \$500,000 if unemployment benefits for the 10-month employees and those part-time employees who are defined as non-teaching were to apply for the eight total weeks of breaks during the course of the year.

The bill has not been scheduled for further action at this time. Contact Lori Sattenspiel (lsattenspiel@osba.org) for more information.

View SB 470:

www.osba.org/Resources/Article/Legislative/BillTracking.aspx?s=15&t=&r=&q=sb_0470&c=50&key=SB_04700&ptadd=: SB_470_Details

Student Transfer bill debated in Senate Education Committee

Since the 2011 Legislative Session, there have been significant changes to the rules that allow Oregon's K-12 students to attend schools in districts in which they do not reside. While the topic of student transfers may seem mundane, it is an issue that is critically important to the impacted students, families and school districts.

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To briefly recap what has happened since the 2011 Legislative Session:

- 2011 Legislature passed House Bill 3681, creating “open enrollment” in Oregon. “Open enrollment” sunsets in July 2017 unless the Legislature takes further action.
- 2013 Legislature passed House Bill 2747, making changes to Oregon’s long-standing “interdistrict transfer” statute. Most importantly, the bill included language to ensure that all students in Oregon are treated equally in the transfer process and ensured that special education students may not be denied transfers.
- 2013 Legislature passed House Bill 3075 which included provisions to eliminate certain practices that districts were allowed to do under the “open enrollment” law passed in 2011. Specifically, districts were prohibited from using State School Fund (SSF) monies to advertise or recruit students, barred from only accepting students from certain school districts or neighborhoods and were restricted from claiming some SSF transportation grant funds for transporting open enrollment students.
- 2014 Legislature passed House Bill 4007, ensuring that students who have been granted transfers in previous years could move to the front of the line when requesting new transfers and allowing students who move during the school year to finish out the academic year without a transfer agreement.

Together, those four pieces of legislation have significantly altered the landscape for student transfers in Oregon.

With the impending “sunset” of the open enrollment statute in 2017, several Confederation of Oregon School Administrators members convened a workgroup that began meeting in 2014 to attempt to craft a new, seamless transfer process to take the place of the current open enrollment and interdistrict transfer statutes; it is meant to be a successor system. OSBA Legislative Specialist Morgan Allen provided staffing and policy expertise for the workgroup.

Currently, there is significant confusion for students, parents and districts about the two processes and their differing rules, procedures and time lines. **Senate Bill 709** is an attempt at highlighting the policy questions that need to be answered when crafting a new system for student transfers that treats all children equitably, is easy for families to understand, is more practical for districts to implement and gives due consideration to the education of all students in Oregon. And most importantly, SB 709 starts from the premise that each student who is interested in transferring shall be treated equally and without discrimination.

While the bill needs amendments, OSBA supports efforts to find common ground on the challenging issue of student transfers. SB 709 represents a well-intended effort to balance the needs of students and families who are seeking to transfer to another school district with the needs of the students who choose to stay in their neighborhood school.

Contact Morgan Allen (mallen@osba.org) for information on SB 709.

View SB 709:

www.osba.org/Resources/Article/Legislative/BillTracking.aspx?s=15&t=&r=&q=sb_0709&c=50&key=SB_07090&ptadd=: SB 709 Details

Questions about legislative issues?

Contact the OSBA Legislative Services Team:

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Contact your legislator

Find your legislators’ contact information on the Oregon Legislature’s website:

www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html

Enter your address, or click on your district on the map, then:

- For Representatives – click the House tab
- For Senators – click the Senate tab

To contact your legislator by phone, call the Capitol Switchboard at 1-800-332-2313.