

OSBA Legislative Highlights



the Promise
OF OREGON



February 17, 2017

Week of hearings spotlight depth of PERS problems

The Public Employees Retirement System has a growing liability that is affecting the ability of cities, counties and school districts to provide services. PERS payments are dollars that schools will not get to spend in the classrooms.

The Senate Committee on Workforce, chaired by Sen. Kathleen Taylor (D-Milwaukie), held hearings this week on two bills related to PERS.

Two school board members from the Bend-La Pine district came to Salem to testify Monday.



Cheri Helt

"I urge you to make some very difficult choices by making these changes to our current Public Employees Retirement system," **Cheri Helt** said. "If you choose to look the other way and keep this system as it is today, we know our students will receive cuts to their education for at least the next 10 years."



Peggy Kincaid

Peggy Kincaid, the other Bend-La Pine School Board member, also addressed the committee.

"We should be talking this legislative session about how we're going to spend new revenue, but instead we're trying to figure out how to cut programs and increase class sizes so that we can absorb looming PERS increases for the foreseeable future," she said.

"It's incredibly frustrating and demoralizing. I'm looking for lawmakers who are bold and creative enough to tackle the problem."

The committee opened its first hearing Monday by inviting PERS Executive Director Steve Rodeman to present an overview of the system, including its legislative history and financial status. Senior Deputy Marisa James, legislative counsel, gave an overview of PERS case law and the most recent 2015 Moro case that challenged the 2013 reforms passed in the regular and special sessions, overturning much of the reforms.

Sen. Tim Knopp (R-Bend) led off testimony, saying, "It's in the best interest of all of us to work together to get the best solution."

Knopp spoke on two bills: [Senate Bill 559](#) would change the final average salary calculation and [Senate Bill](#)

[560](#) would redirect the employee contributions that are currently going into individual accounts. The money saved by these two bills would directly impact the burgeoning PERS liability, resulting in the eventual reduction of the PERS rates that school districts pay monthly.

The Capitol building was flooded Monday with PERS beneficiaries who spoke in a marathon committee meeting about reductions in their pensions.

Controlling costs is a priority for OSBA's members, as is recruiting and retaining quality staff. OSBA will continue to push for changes in the PERS system that bend the cost curve and help maintain a stable and adequate retirement system for current and future PERS retirees.

The committee took no action on SB 559 and SB 560 during the hearing.

The committee heard from the Oregon State Treasury on Wednesday about the state of Oregon's investments. John Skjervem, the treasury's chief investment officer, told the committee that Oregon is No. 1 among its peers for its returns, making it unrealistic to point to better returns on investments as a solution.

Knopp added three more recommendations that could become bills aimed at reducing the unfunded liability. Knopp will propose lowering the multipliers used to figure benefits to 1 percent or 1.2 percent. Currently those multipliers range from 1.5 percent to 2 percent, depending on area of service. Knopp will also propose changing the interest rate for money match, as well as eliminating vacation and sick leave payments that increase the final average salary, known as "spiking."

- *Lori Sattenspiel, interim director of legislative services*
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OSBA Executive Director Jim Green, flanked by moderator Betsy Hammond (left) and consultant Tim Nesbitt, spoke Friday at the City Club of Portland on potential solutions for resolving mounting PERS bills. (Photo by Alex Pulaski, OSBA)

Equity in education includes culturally relevant content, advocates for SB 204 say

Karanja Crews, who founded Teaching With Purpose, told the Senate Education Committee on Tuesday that Oregon needs a plan for culturally relevant content and pedagogy in instruction.

The group is the main proponent of [Senate Bill 204](#), which aims to tackle Oregon’s persistent student achievement gap.

“We have been in this state of emergency for years,” said Crews. “We have so many different types of emergencies in education—achievement gaps, disproportionate discipline gaps, even a wealth gap since the early 1970s.”

Crews talked about the challenges that students from traditionally underserved communities face. According to data Crews presented, there were approximately 43,000 instances of discipline in Oregon schools last year.

- 70 percent of instances involved students from low-income families.
- 16 percent of the 14,000 black/African-American students had at least one discipline incident.
- 11 percent of the 10,000 American Indian/Alaska Native students had at least one discipline incident.
- 9 percent of the 118,000 Hispanic/Latino students had at least one discipline incident.
- 9 percent of the 4,000 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students had at least one discipline incident.
- 8 percent of the 26,000 multiracial students had at least one discipline incident.
- 7 percent of the 366,000 white students had at least one discipline incident.
- 2 percent of the 22,000 Asian students had at least one discipline incident.

Crews’ presentation advocated for a systemic change, focusing specifically on equity and culturally relevant pedagogy in education. SB 204 would require every “school district, school and educator” to “be certified in culturally responsive practices and competencies.” The specific provisions of this proposed certification are not detailed in the measure’s text.

OSBA supports directly addressing the achievement gap. The 2017-18 OSBA Legislative Priorities address our commitment to the issue, clearly stating that OSBA “Supports Student Achievement” and specifically identifying support for “efforts to increase graduation and high school completion rates, lower the number of dropouts, close the opportunity and academic achievement gaps, and provide additional supports for students from traditionally underserved student populations.”



< See story on page 1. Sen. Kathleen Taylor (D-Milwaukie) chairs the Senate Committee on Workforce, which held hearings this week on what to do about the Public Employees Retirement System. (Photo by Jake Arnold, OSBA)



**Now is the time
to urge your legislators
to invest in public education**

Learn how to advocate for reinvestment in public education that will support student achievement. Receive training at the OSBA and COSA Legislative Day in Salem on March 13, then meet with your legislators to discuss education priorities and share stories from your organization’s perspective.

Registration information is on the OSBA website: www.osba.org/Calendar/Events/Legislative_Day-2017.aspx

Sign up to talk to your legislator

Be sure you are scheduling your appointments with your legislators. Try to schedule appointments after 11 a.m. so you don’t miss OSBA’s program.

If you need to look up phone numbers or email addresses, your legislators’ information is on the Oregon Legislature’s website:

- House – www.oregonlegislature.gov/house
- Senate – www.oregonlegislature.gov/senate

With that acknowledged, OSBA submitted testimony registering some concerns with the measure. In submitted testimony, OSBA Legislative Specialist Richard Donovan said, “Creation of a statewide mandate that would affect every educator, school, and school district that is also absent specificity and details is of concern to OSBA.”

Although OSBA supports the goals of the measure, we have registered our concern that the measure still needs more work before we can fully support its passage. OSBA will continue to work with Crews and Teaching With Purpose on SB 204.

- Richard Donovan
Legislative specialist
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Bill Briefs

Oregon Promise Program

[Senate Bill 55](#)

What it does: The bill would remove the current \$10 million cap on available Oregon Promise grants per fiscal year. The Oregon Promise Program provides money to certain students who meet eligibility requirements for college. Money from the Oregon Promise is used after any federal grants or other scholarships are awarded to the student.

What's new: The bill had an amendment that was adopted by the Senate Education committee. The amendment changes the bill to permit the Office of Student Access and Completion to award promise grants. The amended bill also permits those grants to be in excess of \$10 million.

What's next: The bill will move to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means until further action is scheduled. OSBA will monitor the bill's progress.

Student safety

[Senate Bill 414](#)

What it does: The bill would set up a student threat assessments system to support school personnel with threats to the school, staff and students. This threat assessment program would be set up in the Department of Education and include program and training requirements.

What's new: The bill was heard Feb. 16 in the Senate Committee on Education.

What's next: OSBA will monitor the bill's progress.

Educator Advancement Council

[Senate Bill 182](#)

What it does: The bill would formally set up the Educator Advancement Council, which is charged with implementing educator professional learning and educator supports, including access to mentoring, specialized professional learning, and opportunities for leadership development. The council would replace the Network for Quality Teaching and Learning.

What's new: The bill was heard Feb. 9 in the Senate Committee on Education.

What's next: If the bill is voted out of committee, it will move to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means for funding consideration. OSBA will monitor the bill's progress.

Early Indicator and Intervention System

[Senate Bill 183](#)

What it does: The bill would set up the Early Indicator and Intervention System to help students graduate. The Chief Education Office would help administer the new Graduation Equity Program that is a collaborative approach among educators, parents and communities. The approach would help identify students who need immediate interventions, monitoring for success and modifying interventions that aren't working. This strategy is intended to help keep students on the pathway to graduation.

What's new: The bill was heard Feb. 9 in the Senate Committee on Education.

What's next: If the bill is voted out of committee, it will move to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means for funding consideration. OSBA will monitor the bill's progress.

The Week Ahead

Feb. 17, 5 p.m. Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee attend budget-focused town hall at Hermiston High school.

Feb. 18, 5 p.m. Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee attend budget-focused town hall at Madras High School.

Feb. 20, 8:30 a.m. Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education holds informational meeting on education overview by executive branch.

Feb. 20, 3 p.m. House Education Committee holds public hearing on requiring instruction on civics and financial literacy in schools ([HB 2219](#), [HB 2229](#), [HB 2691](#)).

Feb. 21, 8 a.m. Senate Judiciary Committee holds public hearing on preventing employers from making refraining from using a legal substance a condition of employment ([SB 301](#)).

Feb. 21, 8:30 a.m. Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education holds informational meeting on education overview by executive branch.

Feb. 21, 8:30 a.m. Senate Finance and Revenue Committee holds public hearing on changing property tax provisions ([SJR 3](#), [SB 151](#)).

Feb. 21, 1 p.m. House Early Childhood and Family Supports Committee holds informational meeting on early childhood and K-12 connections.

Feb. 21, 3 p.m. Senate Education Committee holds work session regarding backpack safety ([SJR 6](#)) and paying for vision screenings ([SB 187](#)). The committee holds public hearing on studying how to encourage educators to apply

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for certification ([SB 578](#)) and increasing threshold for receiving special education money ([SB 574](#)).

Feb. 21, 3 p.m. House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee holds work session on removing requirements for veterans to get high school diplomas ([HB 2220](#)).

Feb. 22, 8:30 a.m. Senate Finance and Revenue Committee releases revenue forecast.

Feb. 22, 8:30 a.m. Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education takes public testimony on the Chief Education Office ([SB 5522](#)).

Feb. 22, 3 p.m. House Education Committee holds public hearing on establishing Oregon Quality Education Model Modernization Task Force ([HB 2688](#)), including class size as mandatory collective bargaining subject ([HB 2651](#)) and including access to social workers in local service plans ([HB 2550](#)). The committee holds a work session on adding social workers to list related to decreasing absenteeism ([HB 2648](#)).

Feb. 23, 8:30 a.m. Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education holds public hearing on the Chief Education Office ([SB 5522](#)) and Teacher Standards and Practices Commission ([HB 5038](#)).

Feb. 23, 1 p.m. House Early Childhood and Family Supports Committee holds informational meeting on early intervention in special education.

Feb. 23 Oregon Department of Education presents plan for ESSA implementation to State Board of Education.

Feb. 23 Comment period on Measure 98 rules closes.

Feb. 24, 5 p.m. Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee attend budget-focused town hall at Southern Oregon University in Ashland.

Feb. 25, 1 p.m. Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee attend budget-focused town hall at Lane Community College in Eugene.

Items may be added to committee agendas during the week. The Oregon Legislature keeps an updated page of committee agendas at:

olis.leg.state.or.us/LIZ/Committees/Meeting/List

- Jake Arnold

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