



May 2004
Volume 2, Issue 1

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Legislative Committee Services
State Capitol Building
Salem, Oregon 97301
(503) 986-1813

Background Brief on...

Quality Education Model

Prepared by: Jan McComb

Background

How much does a quality education cost? Policymakers around the country are asking this question as states fund an increasing proportion of education costs and these costs continue to climb.

In Oregon, passage of Ballot Measures 5, 47, and 50 shifted the primary responsibility of funding schools from local communities to the state. In response, the state has become more involved in determining how much money is adequate, leading, in turn, to an examination of how school districts spend their funds.

In 1997, Speaker of the House Lynn Lundquist appointed a committee to determine the cost of a quality education for every student, rather than basing funding decisions on historical levels and guesswork. The committee, consisting of educators, parents, business leaders and legislators, met over the next biennium in an attempt to craft a reliable tool on which to base a K-12 budget and that would correlate funding with student performance. The committee presented its findings in May to the 1999 Legislative Assembly in the form of the Oregon Quality Education Model (available in the Legislative Library).

Supportive of the approach, Governor Kitzhaber and State Schools Superintendent Stan Bunn appointed a Quality Education Commission (QEC) in fall of 1999. As part of its work, that body offered a model that phased-in the funding necessary to implement the model.

The 2001 Legislature continued this work by enacting House Bill 2295 (ORS 327.497- 327.506), which placed the Quality Education Commission in statute and directed it to refine and update the model on an on-going basis. That legislation directed the Governor to appoint, and the Senate confirm, an 11-member Quality Education Commission staffed by the Department of Education. The charge of the commission is as follows:

- Determine the level of funding sufficient to ensure the state K-12 education system meets the quality goals set forth in statute each biennium.
- Identify best practices based on research, data, professional judgment, and public values, as well as their cost.

- Issue a report to the Governor and the Legislative Assembly prior to August 1 in even-numbered years identifying current practices, costs, and expected performance, as well as best practices, costs, and expected performance under those practices.

The Quality Education Model

The Quality Education Model (QEM) identifies components of a quality education, then estimates the cost of those components. The model is based on prototypical schools, encompasses the goals and requirements of the Oregon Education Act, and includes “key quality indicators.” The commission meets monthly to refine the model, and changes are reflected in the biennial report. Effort is made to track school district salaries and other expenses to make estimates as accurate as possible.

The model is not intended to be prescriptive, and schools are not required to adhere to the model’s components.

Prototype Schools

Three prototype schools—elementary, middle, and high—were created to determine the cost of a quality education. The prototype schools are based on certain assumptions.

Prototype School Assumptions

- The size of each school is within a range the research shows is reasonable
- The assumed level of teacher experience is about average for schools in Oregon
- Each school has Internet access
- Teachers use technology for instruction delivery.
- The school is close to an urban area
- The school is slightly below the state median in socioeconomic status (40th percentile)
- The school has identified approximately 13% of their students for special education
- 10% of students are identified as speaking English as a second language
- The principal is supportive of reform goals
- The principal is somewhat skilled as a leader and manager
- Teachers are open to reform goals
- Teachers possess content knowledge necessary to teach to applicable state standards

In Each Prototype School

- Adequate staffing
- Added instructional time and activities for students having trouble meeting standards
- Curriculum development and technology support
- On-site instructional improvement
- Professional development for teachers and administrators
- Assistance with CIM record keeping
- Adequate classroom supplies
- Adequate funds for building maintenance

Elementary School – 340 students

- All-day kindergarten
- Class size average of 20 in grades 1-3, class size of 24 in grades 4-5
- 16 full-time K-5 classroom teachers
- 4.5 full-time specialists in areas such as art, music, P.E., reading, math, TAG, library, second language, or child development
- 90% students meeting reading and math standards

Middle School – 500 students

- Average class size of 22 in core academic courses, with maximum class size of 29
- 21 full-time classroom teachers in core subjects
- 1 additional teacher for math, English, science
- Alternative programs for special needs and at-risk students
- Volunteer coordinator and community outreach worker
- 1 counselor for every 250 students
- Adequate campus security
- 90% students meeting reading and math standards

High School – 1000 students

- Average class size of 21 in core academic courses, with a maximum class size of 29
- 44 full-time classroom teachers in core subjects
- 3 additional teachers for math, English, science
- Alternative programs for special needs and at-risk students
- Volunteer coordinator and community outreach worker
- One counselor for every 250 students
- Adequate campus security
- School-to-work coordinator
- 82% students meeting reading and math standards

Key Quality Indicators

The model assumes that the prototype schools have certain characteristics/traits independent from monetary funding. These characteristics include the following:

- Leadership that facilitates student learning
- Parental/Community involvement
- Organizational adaptability
- A safe and orderly environment
- A district with aligned curriculum and maximum allocation of resources to the classroom
- Effective teachers
- Student connectedness to school

Best Practices

The QEC is also charged with identifying “best practices” for instruction. Examples of best practices identified in the report include personalized education programs, small learning environments, cost-effective management of resources, use of community-based and worksite learning, and a rich and varied elective co-curricular and extra-curricular program.

Linking the Model to Student Performance

The original QEM report stated that the model builds a relationship between funding and performance. “It demonstrates that a certain level of funding can be reasonably associated with a certain level of student performance.”¹ The expected outcome of full funding of the model was that “schools would be expected to demonstrate rapid, sustained improvement in student scores on state assessments, performance tasks, and work samples until 90% are at benchmark or receive the CIM with the remaining 10% making significant progress to be as near to reaching the standard as possible.”²

The 2002 QEM forecast that with full implementation of the model, the percentage of students meeting the reading standard in 2004-05 would be 90% of 3rd graders, 87% of 5th graders, 70% of 8th graders and 58% of 10th graders. Students meeting the math standard in that same time period was predicted to be 87% of 3rd graders, 84% of 5th graders, 65% of 8th graders, and 54% of 10th graders.³

Criticisms of the Model

¹ The Oregon Quality Education Model, 1999.

² Ibid. p. 43

³ Ibid. p. 18. Numbers are estimates from graph.

When the model was released in 1999, House Speaker Lynn Snodgrass appointed a committee to review the model. Reaction to the model was mixed.

Some were very supportive of an approach that tried to take an objective view of the school funding debate, and believed the model’s premise was sound.

Others found areas of fault, such as linking funding with student achievement, particularly with a model based on (potentially flawed) existing practices. Even if there was agreement on best practices, actual schools are not required to use them.

Partially in response to criticisms, when the commission was codified in statute, a direction to the commission to research and include “best practices” in education was added to the model.

Funding Conclusions

For the 2003-05 biennium, costs for full implementation of the model were estimated to be \$6.9 billion. This level of funding would result in a per student funding of \$6,589 (weighted) the first year of the biennium and \$6,832 in the second year. Following legislative Public Employee Retirement System reform, this figure was reduced to \$6.5 billion.

The 2003 Legislature funded education for 2003-05 biennium at \$5.2 billion, or \$5,286 per weighted student. The failure of Ballot Measure 30 further reduced this amount to \$4.9 billion.

While the QEM continues to influence the debate around school funding levels, the legislature has yet to fund schools at the level recommended by the model.

The complete 2002 Quality Education Model may be found at:

<http://www.cosa.k12.or.us/cosainformation/Final%20,%20pdf%20version.pdf>

Staff and Agency Contacts:

Pat Burk Oregon Department of Education
503-378-3600 x 2225

Jan McComb Legislative Committee Services
503-986-1635