Inside this Brief

- **The Quality Education Model**

- **Prototype Schools**

- **Key Quality Indicators**

- **Best Practices**

- **Linking the Model to Student Performance**

- **Criticisms of the Model**

- **Funding Conclusions**

- **Staff and Agency Contacts**

Background Brief on …

Quality Education Model

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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 as 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 kindergarten through grade twelve (**K-12**) budget, one that would correlate funding with student performance. The committee presented its findings to the 1999 Legislative Assembly in the form of the Oregon Quality Education Model.

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

The 2001 Legislative Assembly continued this work by enacting House Bill 2295 (ORS 327.497 to 327.506), that placed the QEC in statute and directed it to refine and update the model on an ongoing basis. That legislation directed the Governor to appoint, and the Senate to confirm, an 11-member QEC to be staffed by the Department of Education. The charge of the QEC 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, and professional judgment and public values, and their costs
- Issue a report to the Governor and the Legislative Assembly prior to August 1st 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 QEC 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 QEM 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 that research shows is efficient
- 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 percent of their students for special education
- Eleven percent 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
- 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
- 4.5 full-time specialists in areas such as art, music, physical education, reading, math, Talented and Gifted, library, second language, or child development

Middle School – 500 students:

- Average class size of 25
- 1.5 additional teachers for math, English, and 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

High School – 1000 students:

- Average class size of 24
- Three 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

Key Quality Indicators
The model assumes that the prototype schools have certain characteristics, traits that are 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 issued in 1999 stated that the model would build 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." 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 percent are at benchmark or receive the Certificate of Initial Mastery (**CIM**) with the remaining 10 percent making significant progress to be as near to reaching the standard as possible."

The 2006 QEM forecasts that with full implementation of the model, the percentage of

students meeting the reading standard by 2014 will be 97 percent of elementary students, 91 percent of middle school students, and 82 percent of high school students. The percentages of students meeting the math standard in that year are predicted to be 97 percent of elementary students, 92 percent of middle school students, and 75 percent of high school students.

Criticisms of the Model
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 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 all costs for full implementation not being part of the recommended funding level and 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 the funds as recommended by the QEM.

Partially in response to criticisms, when the QEC was codified in statute, direction to the QEC included research and inclusion of educational "best practices" in the QEM.

Funding Conclusions
For the 2007-2009 biennium, costs for full implementation of the model were estimated to be $7.766 billion in state resources. This level of funding would result in a per-student (weighted) funding of $7,109 the first year of the biennium and $7,332 in the second year.

The 2007 Legislative Assembly's appropriation for public K-12 education for the 2007-2009 biennium was $6.425 billion, $1.521 billion below the level recommended by the QEM.

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