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Senate Republicans vote down largest education budget in Oregon history

Budget that would have increased school funding by \$1 billion falls victim to GOP's partisan gamesmanship

SALEM—In an effort to stall the legislative session, Oregon Senate Republicans voted down the largest budget ever for Oregon schools, which would have provided schools with one billion dollars over current levels. Every single Senate Republican voted against Senate Bill 5519, which failed on a vote of 15-15.

“It is highly unfortunate that the Senate GOP has chosen to engage in partisan brinksmanship instead of delivering on Oregonians’ biggest priority: to fund our schools,” said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland). “Without this historic increase in funding, school districts will not be able to reverse the trend of teacher layoffs and large class sizes. Oregonians sent us here to deliver a strong schools budget, and it’s completely unacceptable for the Senate Republicans to allow partisan games to get in the way of that.”

In recent years, school districts from Ashland to Beaverton to Corvallis have been forced to make dramatic cuts by reducing the number of schools days, laying off teachers, cutting elective programs like arts and music, and cramming students into larger classes. The school budget rejected today by the Senate Republicans would have taken Oregon’s schools in the opposite direction by substantially reinvesting in public education.

A coalition of school advocates, including the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, Oregon School Boards Association, and Oregon Education Association have identified the \$6.75 billion for schools as a “Stability” budget that would allow the vast majority of districts to avoid cuts, improve student performance, and potentially add back programs.

“Senate Republicans have placed themselves squarely between school children and a better education. Without this budget, it means more teacher layoffs, shorter school years, and more and more cuts,” said Rosenbaum. “While the \$6.75 billion budget for schools was not a perfect budget, it is far and away our strongest schools budget in years. To stand in the way of progress and stability for our schools is downright inexcusable.”

Senate Republicans indicated that they are taking the historic school budget hostage in exchange for more tax breaks for the wealthy.

The \$6.75 billion in school funding proposed under SB 5519 comes from a direct appropriation of \$6.55 billion and \$200 million in savings from the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) enacted in Senate Bill 822. That bill, which reduced overall PERS costs by over \$3 billion, did not receive a single Republican vote.

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