



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

Oregon State Legislature
State Capitol
Salem, OR

NEWS RELEASE

June 19, 2009

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Senate approves education budget for 2009-2011

SB 5520 & 5554 protect full school year, offer certainty to schools

SALEM – The Senate approved a budget for K-12 education this afternoon that will leave the school year intact for Oregon children despite the worst economic recession facing the state in a generation. Through a combination of targeted cuts, stimulus dollars, state reserves, and new revenue, the budget will fund schools at \$6 billion for the next two years—\$5.8 billion in a direct appropriation with \$200 million in reserves set aside for distribution in the second half of the biennium.

“This budget is not perfect, but it is far from the worst case scenario,” said Senator Rod Monroe (D-Portland), co-chair of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education. “The fact of the matter is that we are in very challenging times and we’ve made tough decisions to make this budget work. That said, at the end of the day protecting the school year for Oregon children remains and will continue to be a top priority for this Legislature.”

Last week, legislators approved a revenue plan that protects schools by helping fill the significant loss of state resources experienced during the global financial meltdown. The plan focuses on tax equity among big corporations and the wealthiest in order to preserve vital services on which Oregonians rely. The education budget passed this afternoon utilizes that revenue, combined with budget cuts and withdrawals from the state’s reserves, to keep school services mainly intact.

Use of reserves to help fund public schools will leave approximately \$500 million in reserves and other available resources in case revenue drops further in the coming months.

“Parents, students, and teachers are watching today to see what kind of statement this Legislature will make about how it values schools,” said Senate Majority Leader Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin). “I think we’ve made the statement today, with this budget, that we will not make kids carry the burden of these challenging economic times. Public education will continue to be of utmost importance to Senate Democrats.”

Upon final approval, the education budget will allocate \$2.94 billion in the 2009-2010 school year. From 2010-2011, schools will receive \$3.06 billion— including the \$200 million set aside for the latter half of the biennium. While the Legislature does not have direct control over how those dollars are used by individual school districts, these amounts should allow most schools to maintain a full school year without draconian cuts to staff and services.

“Stability is key to the success of our schools,” said Senator Margaret Carter (D-Portland), co-chair of the Ways and Means Committee. “This budget offers school districts certainty that they can keep their doors open and continue to provide a quality education to our children and grandchildren.”

Both bills passed out Joint Ways and Means with a unanimous vote. They will now go to the House for a vote.

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