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Republicans say K-12 budget sells students short

Salem, OR – Senate Republicans in the Ways and Means Committee voted “no” on the K-12 budget bill brought forward by Democrats on Friday morning because it leaves Oregon students stuck in underfunded and inadequate classrooms. Republicans believe this legislature has the ability to do more for students, with a compromise PERS reform proposal that would allow for substantially more investments in classrooms, and better outcomes for students.

“This budget sells our students short, and I’m not willing to do that,” said Senator Chuck Thomsen (R-Hood River). “We can and must do more. Having the willingness to make larger reforms to Oregon’s broken retirement system would enable this legislature to make big, game-changing investments in our classrooms. This budget doesn’t have to be this small.”

Oregon’s leading education advocacy groups have called the \$6.55 billion proposed by Democrats an inadequate school budget. The coalition, including the Oregon Education Association, the Oregon School Boards Association, Confederation of School Administrators, Oregon Parent Teacher Association, and Oregon School Employees Association, said such a budget means that schools will “face another round of painful cuts.”

“Put simply, \$6.55 billion is not enough for our schools, and not enough to change education outcomes for students,” said Senator Jackie Winters (R-Salem). “This budget should be making new investments in schools by adding back teachers, reducing classroom sizes and lengthening school days. This budget might maintain the status quo for some districts, but the status quo is clearly not working, and it isn’t good enough for our kids.”

The results of Oregon’s chronic underfunding of education are well documented. The *Oregonian* Friday morning verified that Oregon has the 3rd largest class sizes in the nation. Education Week has stated that Oregon is 46th for K-12 achievement. A survey by COSA confirms that Oregon per-pupil spending is 7% less than the national average.

Republicans proposed a compromise PERS proposal on Thursday, hoping Democrats could join them in supporting \$1.4 billion in reforms. While such reforms would not entirely fix the PERS problem, they would allow for a K-12 budget close to \$7 billion, and allow school districts to make major investments in teachers and school days.

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