

Senate Republican Office

Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE, S-323
Salem, Oregon 97301

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CONTACT: Michael Gay
(503) 986-1950
(503) 781-8559

Bi-partisan coalition demands more for K-12

Oregon is capable of a game-changing \$7 billion buying power for local classrooms

Salem, OR – A bi-partisan group of Senators voted down an inadequate education budget on the Senate floor Monday morning. Republicans pushed for more than \$6.8 billion in cash for local schools, while most Democrats have been content with a \$6.55 billion school budget, a funding level education advocates have called a “cuts budget.”

“A \$6.55 billion budget is simply not enough to help districts add back teachers, school days, elective classes and raise test scores after years of underinvestment,” said Senator Bruce Starr (R-Hillsboro), who led the floor fight for the larger \$6.8 billion education budget. “Oregon has students, parents, teachers and administrators that are capable of greatness, of achieving excellence. But we must give them the resources they need to succeed.”

During the debate on Senate Bill 5519, which contained the Democrat’s \$6.55 education budget, Republicans moved to amend the bill with \$6.8 billion in school funding. Republicans also tried to bring Senate Bill 854 to the Senate floor, which contains more comprehensive fixes to a broken public employee retirement system. With a higher funding level and more robust PERS reforms, schools would have more than \$7 billion in buying power. Both proposals were defeated on party line votes.

Senator Chris Edwards (D-Eugene) sided with Republicans in voting against Senate Bill 5519 and its inadequate education funding levels.

“If we can do more for our schools, why wouldn’t we?” said Senator Chuck Thomsen (R-Hood River.) “There is more than \$1.2 billion extra to spend this year, and with more substantial PERS reforms we can give local schools even more buying power. We have the opportunity, and classes need the support. It just makes sense.”

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.”

“Next fall, thousands of Oregon kids are going to climb on board a bus, head to school, and walk into some of the nation’s largest class sizes,” said Senator Alan Olsen (R-Canby). “We need smaller class sizes, more teachers and longer school years. And none of those things can happen without more money.”

The results of Oregon’s chronic underfunding of education are well documented. The *Oregonian* last week 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.

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