

State senators, ODE call for more summer school funding

They want Oregon to invest \$200 million in summer programs to help students recover credits and spend time with counselors, mentors and peers



Students prepare to go class at Weddle Elementary in Keizer on their first day of the 2021-2022 school year.

FILE PHOTO, Keizertimes

By **ALEX BAUMHARDT**
Of the Oregon Capital Chronicle

Schools and summer educational programs need \$100 million more to help students recover from pandemic-related school closures, according to the state Education Department, education groups and several state senators.

Testifying at a meeting of the Senate Committee on Education on Tuesday, they said Oregon needs more programs to help students recover credits, spend time among peers and counselors and address behavioral issues that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Dave McDonald, vice president of public affairs and strategic initiatives at Western Oregon University, said it needs more money to sustain summer classes into the future. The university hosts summer programs for high school students and incoming college freshmen.

"The challenges that COVID has created for us are ongoing, not just for the class of '22 coming in," McDonald said. "The middle school students will have a deficit they have to overcome, and we will have many years of needing these types of summer programs."

Officials from the Department of Education, the Coalition of School Administrators and others also spoke in favor of boosting spending for

summer programs.

Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, and Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, have called for an additional \$100 million for summer programs, adding to \$100 million from last year which was not spent because funding wasn't available until June, which didn't give educators much time to plan.

During the 2021 legislative session, a bill devoting \$205 million to summer programs passed as response to COVID learning losses.

The money went to 161 school districts, 69 charter schools and thousands of community programs.

Still, the grants allowed programs to serve more than eight times more students last summer than the year before.

More than 101,000 students took part in summer programs last year, compared with nearly 13,000 in 2020.

Dembrow and Courtney have called for using the leftover \$100 million for programs this summer and adding another \$100 million to cover more programs. The majority of summer educational programs in Oregon are paid for by participant fees, according to the Oregon Afterschool & Summer for Kids Network.

Dembrow said he would like to expand access to low-income households by not charging families as much.

"The more we can provide resources to kids from poorer families, with good, stimulating programs, the rewards will be great in the future," Dembrow said.

Dembrow said the additional \$100 million will be considered a budget item, not tied to any bill, and be considered by the Capital Construction Subcommittee under the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. The subcommittee works on the state budget.

Both Dembrow and Courtney see increased funding to summer schools and programs as a vital step to getting the state closer to year-round schooling.

According to Courtney, "In the end, it's the beginning of really talking about a full year of school."

Dembrow said that universal kindergarten was initially optional for schools but became so popular that it was made mandatory statewide.

"It didn't start out that way when I was a freshman in the Legislature," Dembrow said. "Year-round school reminds me of that."

Courtney said at the very least, Oregon needs to maintain robust funding for summer school in the years ahead.

"This is as much about helping students who are behind now as helping students of the future," he said.

VOLUNTEER *of the Week*

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Where and how do you volunteer?

As a retired educator, I volunteer by being a member of the Latino Action Committee (L.A.C.) The L.A.C. has been in existence since 2014 and consists of six community members who are former migrant individuals who care about the future of our youth and community. The L.A.C. focuses on Latino representation and participation in education and the community. Since 2018 we have awarded scholarships to graduating migrant Latino students from McNary High School. During the summer months, myself, my family and the L.A.C. volunteer by visiting migrant families at their migrant housing complex. We donate books and supplies to the children and parents. I also recently became a board member of the Keizer Community Library since having books and reading resources are very important for me. I think it is very important for Keizer to have its own public library so we can offer valuable resources and literacy opportunities to our youth and our community in general.

Why do you volunteer?

I volunteer because it's the right thing to do. It's my way of helping my community.

What does volunteering do for you?

I do the things I do because they are meaningful to me and it is humbling to be part of something I care about.

How would you get others to volunteer in their community?

I reach out to people I know, friends, or community leaders and share volunteer opportunities on projects I am involved with or volunteer opportunities in our Keizer community. It is important to get involved in something that you are passionate about, that is meaningful and has a purpose in helping others.