

State lawmakers detail education wish list

An ambitious plan for improvement

By PARIS ACHEN, AUBREY WIEBER and CLAIRE WITCOMBE
Oregon Capital Bureau

A small group of legislators spent a year compiling their wish list of improvements to Oregon's failing education system.

Now they have five months to whittle it down to something realistic, find a way to fund it and sell the rest of their colleagues on spending up to \$3 billion more on K-12 education. The state currently spends about \$8.2 billion.

"We only get one chance to educate our children," said state Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner. "They're only in first grade once, they're only in 10th grade once. We need to take advantage of that opportunity."

A report released Thursday details the wish list a legislative committee compiled after a summer of hearings and tours around Oregon. The report echoes much of what the committee already has said publicly is needed to improve schooling for Oregon's children. That includes a longer school year, more state-paid preschool, diversity among teachers and smaller class sizes.

It also shows lawmakers have learned from past mistakes.

"Historically, the school state fund has not come with strings attached," said state Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, D-Portland, co-chair of the Joint Committee on School Success. "What we are trying to do is to ... tie this funding to outcomes. It's not just, let's put more money in the state school fund."

That means school districts around Oregon might have to agree to measurable improvements to get and keep extra state money.

The state would work with school districts to come up with tailored plans. What works in a large, urban school might not be right for a school of just a couple of hundred students, legislators said. If the districts follow through on the plan and see improvement, the state would continue paying for their initiatives.

"We want to focus on outcomes-based funding," Smith Warner said. "... What is most responsive to your community's needs, and how you're going to measure your success and how we're going to measure your success."

Transform the system

The proposals would transform Oregon's school system in every way, from how the state intervenes with toddlers at risk of abuse to technical training for high school seniors who aren't college bound. Fewer kids would go hungry and more children in poverty would be able to go to preschool under the new plan.

The lawmakers emphasized bolstering services for low-income families with young children, starting the help at infancy.

"Kids in crisis can't learn," Smith Warner said. "We have students all across



State Sen. Lew Frederick talks with Portland students in September during a tour of the state by the Joint Committee on School Success.

Pamplin Media Group

'WE ONLY GET ONE CHANCE TO EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN. THEY'RE ONLY IN FIRST GRADE ONCE, THEY'RE ONLY IN 10TH GRADE ONCE. WE NEED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT OPPORTUNITY.'

State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner

the state, urban, rural, from the biggest schools to the smallest, that have had significant trauma. They're facing food insecurity, housing insecurity. The schools need to deal with that."

In that vein, legislators want to expand Early Head Start. It provides full-day programs for infants and toddlers from low-income families but is only available to 2,064 kids of the 25,000 eligible.

The group found the state wasn't adequately funding early intervention and early childhood special education. Full funding would cost an additional \$37.5 million per year.

The legislators also propose propping up Oregon's most needy families. Committee members found state programs provide home visits to only 10 percent of 30,000 at-risk families who need such services.

The 84-page report stops short of outlining how to pay for all of these ideas. They have punted those questions to three smaller groups of lawmakers who on Thursday will sort out the details, including how to pay for these changes.

Lengthening the school year and limiting class sizes are among the most expensive recommendations.

Committee members found Oregon's school year, which ranges from 150 days to 170 days, isn't enough. They would like to reach the national average of 180 days.

But adding those days would cost an estimated \$258 million per year.

And caps on class sizes — which would range from 20 in kindergarten and first grade to 29 for core academic classes in grades 6 through 12 — would cost about \$185 million per year.

Higher goals

Other goals reach higher, aspiring not to just fall in line with national averages but exceed them.

The legislators want state-subsidized education for teachers, with an emphasis on those going on to instruct career and technical education.

A state-organized mentorship system would bump up salaries for teachers who agree to mentor others and create an advancement council inside the state education department to help

teachers succeed.

Legislative budget analysts say the mentorship program could cost \$234 million a year.

They also propose hiring more specialists like music teachers, librarians and school counselors.

Ideally, the state's teachers should reflect the state's demographic makeup, legislators said. Some money would be dedicated to helping local school districts "grow their own" future workforce with scholarships

for students from "racially and linguistically diverse" backgrounds who want to become teachers

Smith said he supports the committee's requests — but it's not clear if his fellow Republicans agree.

In an interview this week, Senate Republican Leader

Herman Baertschiger, R-Grants Pass, dismissed the notion that more funding means better education.

"I see private schools having less money but having better results," Baertschiger said. "I'm trying to figure out what's going on here."

"If we give them \$2,000 per child more and we don't have better results in a few years, do we give them another \$5,000?" Baertschiger continued. "I mean, when do we stop?"

Palatable

To make it more palatable and not a shock to the economy, legislators would have to trim the package.

"We need to prioritize," House Speaker Tina Kotek said "I will be the first one to say we are not going to be able to fund everything, so what are those key sets of investments we know will have the most return on investment in terms of the outcomes we want, and focus on that 'what' and then get to the 'how.'"

Kotek said revenue ideas should start to trickle out of committee hearings soon.

The legislators said for years, Oregon has failed to address school funding. If it's going to take a shot at reform, lawmakers need to make up for past neglect. It's time to aim big, they said.

"If there was ever a time in Oregon's history when we really needed to take a look at educating our children and getting maximum value for our dollar, it's now," Smith said.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group, Pamplin Media Group and Salem Reporter.

WANTED
Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber
Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA
Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

DEL'S O.K. TIRE
point S
TIRE and AUTO SERVICE

Del Thompson, former owner of OK Rubber Welders.
Klyde Thompson, owner of Del's OK Tire Point S Tire and Auto Service, uses Nokian All-Weather Tires on his personal vehicles.

Nokian tires offer superb handling on wet or dry summer roads and superior grip in wintry conditions. Get the best of both roads with Nokian All-Weather Tires for safety and carefree driving comfort.

YOUR #1 SOURCE FOR TIRES
CUSTOM WHEELS
AUTOMOTIVE SERVICES
Over 70 years of the Thompson family putting you first!
(503) 325-2861
35359 Business 101, Astoria
MON - FRI 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
SAT 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM
pointstire.com/astoria

Adopt a Pet
Brandy
8 year old female American Pit Terrier
A genial mix of generosity and cheerfulness. Life should be this simple.
(More on <http://Petfinder.com/>)

Sponsored By **CLATSOP ANIMAL ASSISTANCE**
CLATSOP COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER
1315 SE 19th Street, Warrenton • 861-PETS
www.dogscats.org Noon to 4pm, Tues-Sat

THE COASTER THEATRE PLAYHOUSE PRESENTS
VANYA and SONIA and MASHA and SPIKE
FEB. 1-23, 2019
Tickets \$20 or \$25
Shows begin at 7:30pm
Sunday shows at 3:00pm
Sponsored by Mike & Tracey Clark
COASTER THEATRE PLAYHOUSE
108 N Hemlock St
Cannon Beach, OR
Tickets: 503-436-1242
coastertheatre.com

EMERALD HEIGHTS APARTMENTS
Astoria, OR
Small and Large Unfurnished 2 Bedroom Units
Now Available!
NEWLY REMODELED
NEW APPLIANCES, NEW LIGHTS
NEW CARPET/VINYL FLOOR
NEW BATHROOM VANITIES & MIRRORS
2-BEDROOM APARTMENTS
★ All Rents Include: Electricity • Garbage • Water ★
for more information call **503-325-8221**
Monday - Friday 9-5 • NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY
AN AFFORDABLE PLACE TO CALL HOME
Email: emeraldheights@charter.net
or visit our website: emeraldheightsapartments.com