

Advocates Rally at Capitol

Want schools saved from deep cuts

(AP) — Several thousand parents, students and teachers converged on the State Capitol in Salem Monday to urge lawmakers to protect Oregon's schools from deep cuts and keep schools open for a full school year.

Taking advantage of the Presidents Day holiday, the various school advocates massed on the Capitol's front steps to press their case that lawmakers should dip into reserve funds, raise new revenue or take other steps to keep schools afloat into June.

The federal stimulus plan awaiting President Obama's signature Tuesday offers help for Oregon's schools, but it might not be enough to avert all budget cuts in light of the state's worsening revenue picture.

That's why Oregon lawmakers need to consider, among other things, using the nearly \$400 million in the state's education reserve fund to protect schools, some school boosters said Monday.

"If we have to dip into reserves to keep this school year whole, then I absolutely support us doing that," said state School Superintendent Susan Castillo, who joined the crowds of students and parents for the rally



An estimated 5,000 people showed up at the State Capitol in Salem Monday to urge lawmakers to protect public schools from deep cuts and keep schools open for a full school year.

organized by Stand for Children.

A shortened school year is a real possibility in districts across Oregon unless lawmakers find a way to preserve funding through the remainder of the current budget, Castillo said.

"We've had some districts tell us it could be cut by two weeks, and others have said it could be

more than that," she said.

Senate President Peter Courtney and House Speaker Dave Hunt, who spoke at the rally, said they are committed to making Oregon school children a top priority, but the state's dismal revenue picture is going to force lawmakers to make tough choices.



Students line up outside the business office at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus in north Portland.

Bad Economy Hurts PCC Budget

Pinches operations as enrollment grows

More students are turning to Portland Community College for higher education at the same time state support for its operating costs are evaporating because of the economic downturn.

Overall, the number of students taking classes at PCC grew by 4.2 percent this fall, but increased 11.4 percent when you factor full-time equivalent (FTE) students.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski proposed \$485 million for the Community College Support Fund in the 2009-11 biennium, but due to the rapid deterioration of the economy, that figure will likely be reduced another \$50 million. Overall, the PCC expects state support for operation costs will be reduced by 13 percent.

"With this level of funding, we will have real budget challenges for the biennium," said PCC President Preston Pulliams. "We estimate state funding to PCC would be reduced by \$9.8 million in the first year of the biennium and \$8 million in the second year."



Preston Pulliams

With the increase in core credit enrollment, passage of a recent bond measure and expansion of sustainability initiatives, the cuts to funding have put even more pressure on college leaders to keep PCC affordable and accessible to everyone in the community.

Any decision to increase tuition or fees will be made by the PCC Board of Directors.

"This recession is driving more students to community colleges," said Denise Frisbee, who chairs the board. "In tough economic times, PCC is the 'first responder' for work-

ers who are laid off, whose companies fail, or who are looking to bolster their résumé. We are a safety net for the workforce."

Pulliams said that the college is working with state and local leaders to communicate these messages and build awareness of the community college's value.

"Despite these budget challenges, we will need to make sure that we maintain a foundation of programs and services that we can build on when the economy recovers," Pulliams said. "If we do, PCC's future will continue to be on solid ground."

Former Gang Leader Talks

A nationally known African American speaker and former Kansas City gang leader who works to eradicate gang violence in communities across the country will lead a free workshop for parents in Vancouver.

P.O.S.S.E. (Peers Organized to Support Student Excellence), will lead the "What Kids Know and Parents Wish They Did," workshop on Saturday, Feb. 28 from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Southwest Washington boys and Girls Club, 409 N.E. Ander-

son Rd. in Vancouver.

Other expert speakers will address topics that include drugs and alcohol, talking with your kids, and healthy relationships.

Parents must register by calling the Boys & Girls Club at 360-567-1152.

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