

# Lawmakers pass \$9.3 billion budget for schools

By DIRK VANDERHART  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon lawmakers on Thursday, June 3, signed off on a \$9.3 billion budget to fund K-12 schools for the next two years.

That's a record allotment for the State School Fund doled out to districts around the state, and is expected to be approved by Gov. Kate Brown in coming days. But the package, though large, was not enough to stave off a last minute push for more.

As the budget bill, Senate Bill 5514, came up for a vote in the House of Representatives, state Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, moved that it be returned to committee.

Smith, like the rest of his party, some Democrats and many school officials, believes the \$9.3 billion isn't enough to adequately fund K-12 education for the next two years. They've pushed instead for a \$9.6 billion budget.

"We're just coming out of a pandemic, and the notion of having a good budget isn't good enough this time," Smith argued on the House floor after moving for the bill to be sent back to committee.

Such parliamentary maneuvers have been fairly common this session, with Republican lawmakers attempting to pull their favored longshot bills out of committee for an immediate vote, or to send legislation they don't like back to be amended. Normally, there is no question that majority Democrats will unite to defeat the motions.

But as Smith pointed out, a chunk of Democrats also favor a more robust schools budget. On June 1,



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Students settle into Michael Bittorf's Advanced Placement English class at Pendleton High School on March 31, 2021. Oregon lawmakers on Thursday, June 3, signed off on a \$9.3 billion budget to fund K-12 schools for the next two years.

13 lawmakers — including eight House Democrats — signed onto a letter arguing for more funding in a variety of education areas.

Citing jaw-dropping estimates in the state's latest

billion will result in cuts to schools is contested. According to the Legislative Fiscal Office, school districts only need about \$9 billion to maintain their services levels.

ably so that we don't have those ups and downs two years from now and that we do take care of our children," Rayfield said.

He noted that schools would see hundreds of millions of dollars in additional funding from a new business tax lawmakers passed in 2019 in order to bolster education funding. Democrats hastened to point out June 3 that Republicans opposed that tax.

Republicans supporting more schools money paid little attention to that argument, saying districts can more flexibly use funds sent to them in the schools budget.

"Most of the classrooms in my district don't have air conditioning, do not have appropriate ventilation, and it's been an issue," said state Rep. Lily Morgan, R-Grants Pass. "The funds that we're negotiating today have the flexibility for those smaller areas."

In the end, all eight House Democrats who'd asked for more schools money in the June 1 letter stuck with their party leadership, and helped vote down the Republican motion on a 37-23 vote.

The budget then passed on a 36-20 party-line vote.



Smith

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— State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner

quarterly revenue forecast, the lawmakers wrote they "believe the resources exist to strengthen all education investments" before the Legislature adjourns later this month.

Among their asks: An extra \$300 million for the State School Fund.

"According to the Oregon Association of School Business Officials report, the \$9.3 billion budget still will result in cuts for most school districts in our state," said the letter, addressed to the chairs of the Legislature's budget committee. "We urge you to increase the state school fund budget to \$9.6 billion."

Whether or not the \$9.3

In her initial budget proposal, Brown suggested a schools budget of \$9.1 billion and, last month, pointedly criticized legislative leaders when they floated a \$9.3 billion package. She has since come to agree on that amount.

Among those who defended a \$9.3 billion budget on June 3 was state Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, a budget committee co-chair. He argued the proposed dollar figure was adequate for schools and would avoid the specter of cuts in two years, when federal relief funds and other money might be scarce.

"We need to do it sustain-



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Brandon McMinn fishes at the Clearview Pond in May 2020 near Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton.

## Oregon could ditch catch limits due to drought

By MONICA SAMAYOA  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

2015, the last time Oregon experienced such a serious drought.

SALEM — The drought's threat to hatchery-reared trout and other fish is prompting Oregon to consider big changes in how it stocks fish and manages fishing regulations.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 72% of the state is in severe or extreme drought status. That's prompting the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to consider removing bag level limits in some areas, releasing fish earlier in the summer from hatcheries into lakes and streams, and relocating fish to a different body of water to save them.

"Our trout stocking, we typically stock a number of water bodies in the state and at present some of those water bodies either have a very low or no water," Deputy Administrator for Inland Fisheries Shaun Clements said. "So, we obviously can't put fish into them. So, we'll be changing where we stock and when we stock."

Clements said March and April were unusually dry, setting the stage for a drier

"We've had very little rain this month, like historically little rain and because of that and the warm temperature, our stream flows are at 25% of what they would normally be at that time of year," he said.

Impacts to fish populations will vary across the state but migratory fish like salmon and steelhead and areas and tributaries along the coast may see the biggest impact.

"We are going to be seeing more of these drought events through time because of climate change. There's a lot of projections around for these mega-droughts, which are 10- to 20-year droughts," Clements said. "So, this is going to become the new normal."

ODFW suggests anglers may be required to fish in the earlier, cooler time of day and to use barbless hooks so already stressed fish can be released easily and quickly.

Regulation changes will be posted in the Recreation Report by fishing zone.

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