

# Legislature ponders tax plan to raise \$2 billion for schools

By Sarah Zimmerman  
Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon legislative leaders laid out their plan to raise billions of dollars in revenue for schools, as teachers are readying themselves for a walkout to protest a chronic disinvestment in the state education system.

Co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Student Success said Thursday they'll be able to raise approximately \$2 billion in extra revenue each biennium to fund school initiatives focused on early education, increased class time and addressing mental and behavioral health issues in the classroom.

Educators praised the plan, but didn't say if it was enough to put an end to a planned teacher walkout in May. The Oregon Education Association, the state's largest teachers union, said they are monitoring the outcome of the Legislature's revenue proposal.

"Oregon schools are in crisis," said John Larson, president of the Oregon Education Association in a statement. "If the Legislature is able to fully fund their Student Success Act, we could make game-changing investments in all students, including students of color, low-income students, and students from other historically disadvantaged

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— Jim Green, Oregon School Boards Association

backgrounds."

The money will come from a new commercial activity tax, which takes a portion of a business' total revenue. Legislators are still working out the final details, but Rep. Greg Smith, a Republican from Heppner, said the tax is meant to be "spread very thinly across all businesses," with exemptions or smaller fines for small businesses.

The \$2 billion in expected revenue will go to a newly created "Student Success Fund," which will fund additional educational programs and other school initiatives including smaller class sizes and more counseling services.

At least 20 percent of the Student Success Fund money will be invested into early education, including special education and the state's preschool programs. Another 30 percent will be earmarked for statewide initiatives, including universal free meals and bullying prevention measures.

The rest of the money —

approximately \$1 billion every two years — will go directly to schools to be used to improve educational outcomes in a state that suffers from one of the lowest graduation rates in the country.

To access that money, schools will have to submit proposals on how they will use the funds. The plans must address mental and behavioral health needs, and work to reduce educational barriers for students of color and other underserved students.

Educators have said that a lack of funding has forced schools to cut programs, expand class sizes and lay off staff. Schools have also reported not being able to afford enough counselors or other resources to address their students' complex mental health needs, a problem that has only gotten worse over the past decade.

Teachers have reported an increase in violent behavior from students, and a survey of 2,000 Oregon teachers found that 56 percent of educators have evacuated their classrooms at least once in the past year because a student was considered a threat to others.

"Education is almost the last thing that our schools are doing because they have kids who come in who are food insecure, who are housing insecure, who are dealing

with untreated mental and behavioral issues," said Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, a Democrat from Portland and one of the co-chairs of the Student Success committee. "Schools have become the de facto provider for all these services, yet we aren't funding them."

The state will monitor how effectively schools are using the money and whether districts are meeting their performance goals. Struggling schools will be given more resources and technical assistance to boost student success.

"We're very supportive of this plan," said Jim Green, executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association. "We have underfunded our education system for 30 years and this is a great attempt at trying to address that."

Gov. Kate Brown expressed disappointment that the plan didn't include extra money for higher education, including community colleges and universities. She told reporters that higher education is essential for the state's plan to provide quality education from "cradle to career."

Co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Student Success said they support making higher education more affordable, but the issue is out of their purview.

## POWER

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The current schedule, which has been adjusted several times since Idaho Power first proposed the project in 2007, calls for construction to start in 2022 and the line beginning to transmit power in 2026.

Boardman-to-Hemingway — the name refers to the ends of the proposed line, Boardman, Oregon, and Hemingway in Southern Idaho — has provoked criticism from Eastern Oregon residents since it was proposed.

The sections that have prompted the most concern in Baker County include the

area near the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, on the east side of Baker Valley, and in the Durkee area southeast of Baker City.

Idaho Power initially proposed to route the line, which will have towers ranging in height from 100 feet to 180 feet, east of the Interpretive Center.

But concerns about the potential effect on sage grouse habitat led to the current proposed route on the east side of Baker Valley. That section would run near Idaho Power's existing 230-kilovolt transmission line.

That remains the proposed route, and Maffucio said he doesn't expect it will change during the Oregon permitting

process.

The BLM and Forest Service have already reviewed and approved the proposed route.

Maffucio said Idaho Power officials will be negotiating with private landowners along the route to buy easements. These typically would be 150 feet wide, he said.

Although the easements would prohibit the construction of buildings within that corridor, Maffucio said landowners could continue current activities such as farming and livestock grazing.

Critics have repeatedly argued that the transmission line isn't needed, and that it wouldn't provide any tangible

benefits to Baker County.

Maffucio said the existing transmission line has little surplus capacity, while the Boardman-to-Hemingway line would be able to distribute more power, in particular power from renewable sources such as wind turbines, from Oregon into Idaho.

Maffucio acknowledges that, as critics have said, the proposed line has no "of-framp" that would supply power to Baker County.

But he said that if a large company with heavy electrical demand were to locate here, the new 500-kilovolt line would be available to meet the demand, which likely wouldn't be possible with the current 230-kilovolt line.

## HEART TO HEART

### Great music at Churchill School

Shhhh, don't tell anybody but there is a rumor going around that the Churchill Dancehall is bringing some seriously good music to town.

It's true. The Seattle based band, Telekinesis, came through town on a recent Sunday night and gave a very good concert of all original music. The pop/rock influenced tunes were a delight to dance to and enjoyed by the crowd. They left you feeling good and glad that you came out on a Sunday night.

This is the third concert I have enjoyed there this winter, it is great to be able to be up close to the performers and the acoustics and sound are great.

So don't tell anybody what is going on at the Churchill School, it would really be a

shame if the dance floor was crowded with lots of people. But then again it might just be a great party.

Dennis Winkler  
Baker City

### Saying thanks to hospice volunteers

Even when you're dying, there can be a lot of living to do. Hospice volunteers make more special moments possible for the patients and families they serve every day. Nowhere will you find more compassionate people than the volunteers who serve in hospice. Our community is truly a better place because

of their service.

April 7-13 is National Volunteer Week and every single volunteer deserves our appreciation and grateful acknowledgement. I am an employee at Heart 'n Home Hospice and I salute all those who give of their time and talents — particularly to people at the end of life's journey.

In 2018, our volunteers gave over 8,300 hours and drove nearly 60,000 miles for patients and their families. Hospice volunteers are an integral part of the care team. Whether serving at the bedside, in the office, educating

others, or raising awareness, they are the heart of hospice.

I've witnessed countless acts of compassion by our Volunteers, one in particular with my own family member that was on hospice. Grandpa was a veteran and had a veteran volunteer present a certificate of service recognition to him. Watching an act such as this veteran-to-veteran resulted in a beautiful thing — there was not a dry eye in the room.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart to our incredible volunteers!

Kandice Dickinson  
Heart 'N Home Hospice

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## LOCAL BRIEFING

### Baker County Job Fair set for Thursday

A Baker County Job Fair is set for April 11 at the Baker County Event Center, 2600 East St. There will be a priority period for veterans from 1 p.m. to 1:15 p.m., with the fair continuing for the general public through 3 p.m.

More information, including businesses planning to attend, is available at [www.facebook.com/WorkSource.Eastern.Oregon.Baker.City/](http://www.facebook.com/WorkSource.Eastern.Oregon.Baker.City/)

### Community Orchestra concert Friday

The Baker Community Orchestra's spring concert is set for Friday, April 12, at 7 p.m. at the Baker High School auditorium, 2500 E St. There is no admission charge and all are welcome.

The concert will feature American composer Clare Grundman's Hebrides Suite, a collection of folk songs from the isles of the Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland. The islands maintain a strong folk song tradition including the five folk songs in the suite. Also on the program is the Children's March by Percy Grainger, an arrangement of Johannes Brahms' Academic Festival Overture, a rousing march by Oregon composer Steve Hodges, and perhaps a little rock and roll.

The Baker Community Orchestra, under the direction of Russ Carpenter, is made up of volunteer community members. New musicians are always welcome, and instruments are available for loan. There is no audition requirement, and the orchestra is open to any community member who can play a band or orchestra instrument, or learn to play, at a high school level. More information is available by calling Brian Watt at 541-523-4662, and updates are posted on the Orchestra's Facebook page.

### Mothers of preschoolers plan yard sale

The annual yard sale for MOPS — Mothers of Pre Schoolers — is set for April 13 from 8 a.m. to noon at the Nazarene Family Life Center, 1250 Hughes Lane. Spots are available for tables, at \$10 per space, and MOPS asks that people who have a table donate 10 percent of their proceeds to the organization.

More information is available by calling Kimberley Godes at 541-403-3174.

### Wildland fire refresher course set

Eastern Oregon Training Group will have the RT-130 Wildland Fire Refresher course on April 13 in Baker City. The course will start at 8 a.m. at the 5J School District Building, 2090 Fourth St. Cost is \$100. All participants should bring gloves for the practice fire shelter deployment.

Registration can be done at [oregonfiretraining.com](http://oregonfiretraining.com). Pre-registration is requested; the cost will be \$120 at the door. This is a required class for all federal and state contractors. More information is available by calling Laurel Goodrich at 541-403-0907 or Jeff Sherman at 541-519-6213.

### Maker's Clubs planned at library

Two Maker's Club events are planned this month at the Baker County Library, 2400 Resort St. The free events are open to students in grades 4 to 8, and no registration is required.

The April 10 Maker's Club is games day, and on April 24 participants will learn about computer coding.

Both Maker's Clubs are scheduled from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

— Compiled from staff reports and press releases

## COUNCIL

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During the March work session, Owen and City Manager Fred Warner Jr. said the rate increases are needed to raise money for a major wastewater project that city officials expect will cost about \$11 million.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has said the city will have to stop piping its treated wastewater into the Powder River about a mile north of town.

Instead, the city is planning to build a pipeline to move the wastewater to the east side of Interstate 84 to a new storage lagoon. The treated wastewater will be used to irrigate nonfood crops.

Warner said the city likely will boost waste-

water fees over the next two years. Starting July 1, 2020, the monthly residential rate will rise to an estimated \$30.

In other business Tuesday, councilors will:

- Hear a presentation from the Small Business Development Center
- Hear a presentation from Baker City Trash Talk, an organization working to increase recycling
- Award bids for repaving Washington Avenue from the Powder River to Clark Street, and rebuilding curbs and sidewalks along that section
- Review proposed updates to the city's tree ordinance and street tree planting guide
- Hear an update on plans to reduce the fire danger in the city's watershed

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