



SUMMARY: OEA Response to the July 2011 Draft of

“Report to the Governor: Progress Toward a Unified, Outcome-Based 0-20 Education System that Supports Innovative Teaching and Learning”

1. **Concerns with the Process:** The high level of expertise and education attainment of Oregon Education Association members needs a seat at the table. A drive for innovation and transformation in public education must include working educators. Furthermore, Oregon Education Investment Team meetings should be rooted in meaningful dialogue with diverse input and not an exercise in process driven by small groups or closed door meetings.
2. **Urge a Sound Investment Model:** This report must acknowledge and recognize the connection between the decline in Oregon’s status to the decline of spending. Moreover, future investment in our schools must be aligned with the goals of the Quality Education Model to ensure we are meeting the needs of Oregon’s students.
3. **Call for Clarity:** In the spirit of collaboration we ask first for clarity on a number of our concerns throughout the report. However, in the absence of such clarity, we strongly caution the next Board and policy-makers in venturing forward on vague and unexplained ideas such as “outcome based budgeting,” “value added measures,” and “wrap-around services” without carefully and deliberately considering unintended consequences and potentially harmful impacts.
4. **Seek Evidenced Based Recommendations:** This report relies far too heavily on broad claims and assertions while offering very little evidence to support the constructs. As professional educators and on the ground experts, our members are ready and willing to provide an important perspective and we hope that future claims are met with balanced and evidenced based research.
5. **Applaud a Shared Vision:** Our members overwhelming share a vision of student-centered and differentiated approach to teaching and learning. We are heartened by the definition of a positive vision for public education in Oregon.



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“Report to the Governor: Progress Toward a Unified, Outcome-Based 0-20 Education System that Supports Innovative Teaching and Learning”

The Oregon Education Association appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the latest draft of the OEIT Report.

Creating a Process Inclusive of Education Practitioners

The 47,000 members of the Oregon Education Association are professional educators who innovate everyday in classrooms and worksites across the state. As professional educators, members of the Oregon Education Association ought to be at the heart of any discussion leading to successful and intentional innovation in our education system. To date, this has not been the case. The Oregon Education Investment Team included only a minority of educators in its membership, and had only three meetings. This minimal representation doesn't even scratch the surface of the amazing work done by practicing educators and incredible ideas for big and small changes that practitioners are generating every day. An essential part of a credible and, ultimately, successful drive for innovation and transformation in public education needs to include a plan for multiple, deep conversations with working educators and in-the-field observations in classrooms across the public education landscape of our state.

The OEA continues to be concerned that Oregon Education Investment Team meetings are an exercise in process rather than built on a real desire for meaningful dialogue and input. Our experience is that the OEIT is asked to respond to concepts and ideas developed by a smaller group led by the Oregon Business Council, rather than collaboratively generating new ideas or driving the conversation toward meaningful policy changes. Fundamentally, that has led to a process that continues to engender a top-down approach to system change rather than being a catalyst for innovation driven from the bottom up from those front and center in the learning environment.

OEA's believes that the Oregon Education Investment Team ought to engage in a more robust analysis of the resources necessary to fully fund an adequate, equitable and stable public education system as well as what constitutes excellent teaching. As such, we are concerned that there is no recognition of the high level of expertise, education attainment, and classroom magic that Oregon's education workforce at all levels has brought to the table even as school funding has steadily eroded. There is no mention of the role of policymakers (other than the Governor and his Investment Board and staff) in the structure, financing, or policy-setting for public education.

Building on a Sound Investment Model

Governor Kitzhaber made Oregon a national leader in the creation of the Quality Education Model in 1999. The QEM is a strategic public finance initiative focused on driving the capacity of our public school system to equitably meet the needs of all students through targeted investments in educational best practices. We are concerned that the initial framework outlined in this report of the Oregon Education Investment Team would undermine the QEM's charge to identify and create an investment trajectory to support these best practices in our schools. These include such *inputs* into the system as robust professional development to promote and improve instruction and professional practice, or early childhood education to ensure students are provided a foundation for learning and achievement.

We appreciate and support the vision for investment in early childhood and family services. And, we strongly believe that this commitment needs to be carried forward.

The Investment Team's strategic framework is laudable for establishing the goal for targeted investment across the 0-20 continuum, including early childhood education. However, we are concerned that this cannot be done, as stated in this report, by maximizing existing resources and focusing on outcomes alone, especially if those outcomes are as narrowly defined as test scores and graduation rates. By ignoring critical system inputs, or dismissing out of hand any bold reinvestment in our schools aligned with the goals of the Quality Education Model, we fear that our schools will not fully meet the needs of all Oregon's students.

The report's focus on "outcomes" – defined variously as test-score performance, diploma attainment, and "readiness" indicators – is the dominant value. It also appears that there is an underlying focus on speeding up the education process. There appears to be conflicting messages on whether the focus should be on student paced learning or on the drive to push students through the education process as quickly as possible. For example, there is much discussion about early entry, early testing/assessment, on-time graduation, early college enrollment (dual credit), and jump-ahead proficiency pushes. This conflict is acknowledged on Page 7 of the Early Learning Design appendix:

"The Design Team acknowledges that some children...will not be 'reading' or 'ready' in the same manner as their peers. Nevertheless, it is critical that Oregon have methods in place to measure both readiness for K and reading level in first grade, and that these be linked to assessment efforts in K-12."

Declining Investment

At the outset, the report addresses the steady decline, from the 'early 2000s', from the 'top tier' to the "middle of the pack" to the 'bottom tier' of states. To take it a step further, Oregon Schools have been cut by more than \$1 billion over the past few years and its share of the state budget has declined since 2004 from 45% to just 37%. Districts across the state have been forced to cut school days, lay off educators, increase class sizes and eliminate valuable courses.

At no point, however, is the connection made between the decline of Oregon's status to the decline of spending – or, in the report's language, 'investment' - in public education. Again, this is a gaping hole

throughout the report, reflecting what seems to OEA an intentional avoidance of what is likely the single most significant factor in the declining performance that is driving the process and report.

We are concerned that, to date, there has not been meaningful discussion of the wholesale inadequacy of and disinvestment in public education that has resulted in chronic systemic stress, unsustainable resources and profoundly negative impacts on student learning.

We are concerned that failure to balance greater accountability to outcomes-based thinking, without renewed investment to support system transformation, will further undermine real innovation, weaken public support for our schools and ultimately reinforce those who seek to privatize public education.

Below are additional reactions to the report:

- P.1: The concern about English language learners and low-income students is absolutely correct. But, again, the absence of any linkage to reduced spending in our schools and reduced spending in those family and community supports highlighted as keys to early success for our children seems a gaping hole in the analysis and a political/policy road map forward.
- P. 2: We agree that “teaching and learning will have to be considerably more effective and nimble than in the past.” The report, however, does not acknowledge that the required “seat-time” has been driven by all of the testing and assessment requirements and other state and federal requirements that have dominated the last 20 years of education ‘reform’. Indeed, as presented at the beginning of the report – and thematically throughout – this strongly suggests that *educators* are largely responsible and that they need to be told to teach differently in order to reach students. Professional educators *do* understand that assessments are not comprehensive indicators of student achievement, and yet under federal requirements they have no control to make necessary changes to enrich the time they spend with their students. This underscores a critical point of our analysis: Oregon’s educators need to be fully engaged in this work and not presented as those responsible for problems they have resisted and tried to address.

We enthusiastically support the idea that ‘...teaching will continue to expand from drills, seatwork and reliance on textbooks to include more hands-on learning, student-led discovery, group projects and use of on-line resources. Indeed, our members overwhelmingly share a vision of this type of student-centered and differentiated approach to teaching and learning. There are likely hundreds of concrete models that Oregon educators have developed and used successfully that could shape deeper thinking and policy-making. At the same time, we have learned that these kinds of approaches demand not only different structures, but more time to work with students and to prepare and assess as teams. This costs money; money that will not come only from re-structuring and efficiencies, but new money to make this the norm rather than the exception.

Further, we are heartened by the seven bullets that define a positive vision for public education in Oregon.

- P.2+: We are concerned that the report repeats the claim that the “system” blocks and even discourages “innovation” in teaching and learning without specific evidence. It would be more

helpful to identify specific barriers that can be changed or eliminated. This is a fundamental weakness of this report and much of the OEIT process: it seems to rely on broad claims and assertions while offering very little *evidence* to support the constructs.

- P. 3+: The statement is asserted repeatedly that the only conversation provoked by Oregon's education funding system is one that asks "How much money is necessary to keep education delivery the same?" This is simply untrue. The QEM asks a different question altogether: "What does it take to reach and succeed with all learners?" *Oregon's fundamental education funding problem is that it wasn't prepared to accept the answer.*
- P.3: The representation is made that special education funding is a matter of school districts cooking the books. The author says it this way: "*Funding rules currently benefit schools with higher shares of students receiving supplemental services – special education and English-language learning (ELL). Despite the fact that the underlying distribution of students with physical and mental disabilities varies across the state, nearly every school district has identified 11 percent of its students in need of special education (the maximum share of students who are eligible for extra state funding).*" Actually, the truth is that 12.9% is the school district average census – well above the cap amount and below the national incidence average of 13.1%. The clear implication is that school districts are seeing SPED students as a revenue source. Given the propensity for litigation, the federal FAPE and reporting requirements, and the cost of special services, this is simply another statement lacking any "on-the-ground" credibility.
- P. 6: The funding model this report has in mind should cause great concern, especially when it is introduced with the admonition that "**notions of current service levels and shortfalls are abolished**" when an outcome-based approach is used. A key question that remains unaddressed is this: who determines what it SHOULD cost to deliver the results (assuming we buy the goals as expressed in the first place)? Further, we listened and, in this report, search in vain for clarity on what 'outcomes-based' budgeting and delivery actually mean and examples of successful applications of this very vague notion. Moreover, the declaration that budgeting will be based on the '...best way to maximize given outcomes with the resources available' increases our concern about the avoidance of the growing funding/revenue problems, their role in Oregon's declining standing and intentions about connecting revenue growth and system reform/innovation.
- P. 9+: Several references are made to remediation needs at the post-secondary level, an implicit criticism of K-12 for failing to prepare students for college. A couple of things about that, which this report fails to acknowledge: First, the average age of attendance at community college is 35, which is for some students 20 years after their last math class. Anyone would need remediation if away from the subject matter that long. The greater issue is the "lack of alignment between K12 and higher-ed, common definitions of "prepared".

In addition, we want to caution the next Board and policy-makers on the question of 'evidence-based predictors of student moving....' We are profoundly concerned about the introduction of what are generally known as 'value-added measures' into any aspect of student or educator assessment and evaluation. We believe that the data and experience are clear that this notion, driven by many education 'reformers' in the foundation world and by local, state and federal

agencies, is a dead end for real innovation and change that will deeply improve student learning for a lifetime. Oregon needs to tread carefully in this area.

- P. 11: The second bullet point in “The Role of The State” is a directive to “invest in all learners meeting outcomes and ensure accountability for results.” It does not say “calculate what it costs to ensure that all learners are able to meet outcomes and then invest at that level of adequacy.”
- P. 14: The report calls for “an adequately funded, central research capacity” with a unified, 0-20 database. OEA believes that the instructional system also needs funding adequacy. We also believe that Oregon needs to start *re*-investing in the overall capacity of the Oregon Department of Education – not just in data collection. A vital ODE, with dedicated, experienced and fully engaged staff will be an immense asset to an innovation agenda. More education policy-making and support needs to be returned to the public structures so that there is accountability at this level and reliable supports for all aspect of education work and innovation.
- P. 16: While toying with the idea that “outcome-based” education is not the same as “performance-based” education for funding purposes, the report contradicts itself immediately after making that distinction: “But the OEIB should also consider funding models that rise and fall with performance....High schools could be reimbursed when students earn credits associated with demonstrated proficiencies.” This is like saying that we’ll only pay doctors if the patient is and remains healthy.
- P. 17: Much of the contracting out of education is laid out on this page. Through it all, OEA wonders: with all the talk of educational best practices, where’s the funding-level best practices? We (and many experts across the nation) believe that the Quality Education Model is a funding “best practice” device.

- P. 17 "Sustainable Operation" bullet point. The new second paragraph of that text now reads:

First the OEIB would issue the grants with predictability in mind. The grants would be pegged to an inflation rate below the growth of personal incomes. To ensure that learners are not disadvantaged by underperforming education providers, a predictable and sustainable "base" should be established. But as the economy and personal incomes grow, a sizeable share of the gains would go to other funds. And, as the system evolves, proficiency and strategic funding would grow more quickly than sustainable grants.

OEA is concerned that this language suggests that the new "predictable" funding means we won't grow to QEM adequacy

- P. 18+: The Early Childhood System, under this design, now includes the work our K-3 members do in elementary schools, and yet, we had no OEA or teacher representation on the Early Learning Council. Many of the ideas for increasing coordination and collaboration seem common-sense. However, there are some areas of concern, as well. First, nowhere is it mentioned that state law does not require a parent to enroll his child until the age of 7. How does this system plan to contend with that reality? Second, there is no mention of some of the proven educational

design strategies that could help struggling students in the early years to keep pace with their peers – such as summer programs. Third, the management of early learning services is envisioned as a “regional accountability hub” system (P. 4 of Early Learning appendix) that “will include representatives of health, human services, education, business, faith and other community groups”. While we support the concept of wrap-around services, this area needs more work to understand the impact on an organized workforce.

P. 20: This report continues to insist that district consolidation, ESD defunding, and transportation block granting are education “efficiencies” that ought to be pursued. The research is limited around these concepts. What are you using to support your recommendations?

P. 6 of Early Learning Design Team appendix: Item #8 states that the “state will use outcome-based contracts with providers” of educational and other services and “the state will be seeking high performance at lowest possible cost.” Then, as the explanation goes, “Compensation systems for an organization’s workforce will not be prescribed by the state.” Also we are concerned that because the entity the state would contract with is not described as a “school district” that it is implied that like Head Start, the early learning team envisions education of K, 1, 2, and 3 students to be privatized.

Appendix B:

The efficiencies team defines efficiencies as getting more (better test scores than we have now?) for less cost (less than the current low level of investment?). On P. 2 of that report, “promising” efficiencies are practices that put our members’ jobs in the hands of “non-profits, business, counties, and cities” instead of those of the hands of education support professionals. Of course, only by discarding accountability to the goals and research based best practices of the Quality Education Model, does it become possible for elected leaders and policymakers to say that Oregon’s public education system is fully-funded. Taken together this has the potential to lead Oregon toward the “Privatizing Public Schools” model.