

TO: Oregon School Funding Task Force Committee members

Honorable Colleagues and Committee members,

I, State Representative Gene Whisnant HD 53, appreciate Senator Devlin allowing me to address the committee today since I will not be available on the date scheduled for public testimony.

I have served on House and Joint education committees for over eight years. I have introduced legislation purposing elimination or change of the "teacher experience" factor in the formula and elimination or change of the "declining enrollment" factor. The "phantom student" aspect of the "declining enrollment" draft bill gathered a lot of press; but no legislation.

I appreciate the work of the committee on the school distribution formula. Also, I am supportive of studying all of Deputy Superintendent Rob Saxton's "out of the box" proposals for the formula.

However, I am here today to encourage you to first pass legislation to require school districts to report to Oregon Department of Education (ODE) by September of each year: (1) how they are spending the additional funding for ELL and for low-income students and (2) what are the outcomes of their expenditures. In turn, ODE would brief the appropriate education committees each odd year session before March 1st on the school districts inputs and recommend legislation or adjustments to the funding for these weights. I selected these two factors which I believe the most critical to changing Oregon's overall education outcomes.

Your reports indicate support for increased accountability for ELL spending. However, you also report you are very sensitive to the significant resources it would take to implement an accountability system. During my service, I understood we now demand accountability and outcomes from the resources we are spending. We need to know how the \$159 million for ELL and \$180 million for low income is being spent. How can we support increasing funding to address ELL and low-come students without accountability and outcomes? How do we know the additional funding will be spent on these students?

Dan Thatcher with NCSL advises that "most states do not have an accountability system that links the supplemental formula-driven funds generated by weights to those outcomes." Thus, Oregon can lead in establishing accountability of the additional funding for the ELL and low-income factors.

Representatives Witt and Fagan and I recently attended a NCSL leadership workshop on "helping working families." One of our action plans is to submit a bill to require transparency and accountability of additional funds for low-income students.

Again, thank you for allowing me to address the committee and I hope you will consider my comments in your final recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

Gene Whisnant
July 14, 2014