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Media Release – Op-Ed from Mike Scott, Superintendent, Hillsboro School District

The Time for Legislative Advocacy is Now

Parents and community members asked to write their elected officials and urge a K-12 budget of \$7.5 billion to avoid a \$4.5 million loss to Hillsboro School District in 2015-16

March 13, 2015 – Oregon’s Legislators are about six weeks into their full 2015 session, and one of the biggest tasks before them is to pass a budget for the 2015-17 biennium. Those of us in the education field are hearing there is a desire to pass the education budget early, so that other matters can receive attention.

We are very appreciative of some early certainty around the budget, as it makes our planning process a little easier; however, the proposal currently on the table from the Co-Chairs of the Joint Ways and Means Committee is a K-12 budget of \$7.235 billion.

When one looks at the anticipated state revenues for the 2015-17 biennium, there is an increase of nearly 9.5% to the total General Fund/Lottery Fund budget. If K-12 education received that same increase, plus an allowance for full-day kindergarten, it would equate to an allocation of approximately \$7.5 billion.

A K-12 allocation of \$7.5 billion is widely acknowledged as being what school districts across the state need to stay “flat” for the next two years. That doesn’t mean reducing class sizes, adding money back to programs, or expanding the number of support staff—it means simply being able to maintain what they are doing this year for the next two years, while adding full-day kindergarten.

Oregon is often criticized for having one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation. However, that should not come as a surprise to us when we are funding our public schools at one of the lowest levels in the nation. Our outcomes, as a whole, are matching our investments.

New investments in early childhood education and post-secondary education are exciting and much-needed, but we cannot ignore the years of education we are legally required to provide, and the ones we as a country have agreed are most important to the perpetuation of our democracy—K-12.

Oregon has disinvested in K-12 education over the past several years—just ten years ago dedicating more than 44% of its General Fund/Lottery Fund to K-12, and now just over 39%.

While it may not be realistic to expect a return to former spending levels for K-12, with a variety of needs in our state ranging from health care to social services to public safety, we must ask ourselves what the impact will be to our children of continuing to ask more from them while providing them with less.

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If we believe in the importance of education as a way to not only prepare the next generation of citizens and leaders, but also to strengthen our economy, reduce reliance on social services, and to improve communities, we simply must find a way to prioritize our investment in education.

Hillsboro School District takes pride in the fact that we have managed our finances in a responsible manner over the course of the last several years, thanks to our forward-thinking Board, skilled Business Office staff, and much-appreciated cooperation and partnership with our employee groups. Though we had to effectively reduce our budget by nearly \$70 million between 2009 and 2014, we tried to do so in a way that was sensitive to the needs of our students and maintained the integrity of our programs to the extent possible.

That we were able to avoid a true crisis is both a good thing and a bad thing. The good thing is the avoidance of a crisis. The bad thing is we may have a more difficult time getting the message across that we need to do more for our students. We know what it will take to raise achievement for all students. We have been achieving success with our sustained efforts in the areas of standards-based teaching and learning, our Bilingual Program Model, and staff professional development. We have devised a five-step plan for reinvesting in our system and reaching our goal of having all students graduate ready for success in the next phase of their lives. But we first need to stabilize our funding.

I would ask that each of you take just a few minutes of your time to write to your local elected officials and urge them to support a K-12 budget allocation of \$7.5 billion for the 2015-17 biennium. If they pass the \$7.235 billion budget, Hillsboro School District will experience a \$4.5 million shortfall in the 2015-16 school year, which would equate to cutting 9 school days or 55 teachers.

We have created a [template advocacy letter](#) for your reference, as well as a list of our [local elected officials](#). Both are available on our [Budget Matters](#) webpage. Please add your personal information to the template letter or write your own and send it to everyone who represents you right away. There are similar efforts taking place in school districts all around the state.

Together, we can make a difference.

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