

Legislative leaders propose \$54 million cut in school budget

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. -- Today, Oregon legislative leaders announced their most recent proposal to rebalance the budget for the remaining four months of the 2007-09 biennium. The proposal includes a \$54 million cut to schools that will inevitably lead to many Oregon school districts closing school doors early this spring. On average, this will mean a cut of three school days this year.

“Legislative leaders are calling this a restoration fund so they look like they’re doing something for schools, only now they are making us jump through hoops to get it” but this money was already allocated to schools,” said Oregon Education Association (OEA) Vice President Gail Rasmussen. “Bottom line is” they are cutting millions of dollars from our schools and robbing students of a quality education this year. Students won’t get this year back.”

According to an OEA news release, while the current proposal includes more funding for schools than the Co-Chairs of the Joint Ways & Means committee proposed last week, K-12 continues to take a disproportional cut compared to other state-funded services. The \$54 million proposed cut comes after school districts have already made \$61.2 million in painful reductions this school year. Many districts have already been forced to lay off employees and cut instructional days.

Additionally, legislative leaders are leaving federal stimulus dollars on the table that can be applied to ensure a full school year and avoid further layoffs.

“We know that the economic picture continues to look bleak for the 2009-11, but it doesn’t abdicate us of the responsibility to take care of our students this year,” said Rasmussen. “The legislature has the tools to get the job done. They can and should do better for Oregon’s students.” In a statement to the media, legislative leaders asked school districts to meet them “halfway.” The reality is that most Oregon school districts are operating on a bare bones budget, have already slashed what’s left, and cannot absorb another reduction of this size without cutting days.

OEA, along with coalition partners in the education, human services, and public safety communities, are asking for the legislature to step up and use the tools at their disposal this year so we can better plan for how to invest in vital services, grow the economy, and then adjust programs over the long-term to better align to Oregon’s economic reality.

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