



A Recovery Plan for Oregon's Children

2020 SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE SESSION AGENDA

Facing a \$2.7 billion shortfall in the current budget cycle and anticipating legislative action, Chalkboard Project stood with a coalition of over twenty community-based organizations, education advocates, and business groups urging state leaders to mitigate COVID-19's disproportionate impact by directing resources to Oregon's most vulnerable children.

In a joint letter to state leadership, the coalition outlined core equity values that must drive Oregon's short- and long-term recovery plan for children and public education. Those values include a deep commitment to equity; meaningful community engagement; cross-sector partnership; culturally responsive and sustaining approaches; and holding ourselves accountable to making progress for children.

During the second special legislative session, Chalkboard Project urges the Governor and Legislature to provide local school districts, communities, and service providers with the revenue certainty they need to fulfill Oregon's commitment to supporting every child to learn, grow, and thrive. **When balancing Oregon's budget, the Legislature must hold equity as a guiding principle and take decisive steps to address interconnected challenges across our education systems.**

Stakeholders across sectors and communities agree: The compounding crises of COVID-19 and systemic racism require us to fundamentally shift how we think about schools and learning from birth to graduation. **A balanced 2019-21 budget must make strategic investments that address children's immediate needs while laying the groundwork to reimagine how public education works in Oregon.**

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Invest in Early Learning

Ensuring children truly recover from the disruption and trauma of this crisis requires supporting them during their most critical years of childhood development. We must keep in mind that children born now will be entering kindergarten as Oregon's economy just begins to recover.

The Legislature should honor its commitment to ensuring that at least 20% of the funds available to the three Student Success Act (SSA) accounts are transferred to the Early Learning Fund. These funds are essential for the Early Learning Division to continue building an early learning system that is seamlessly aligned with the K-12 system.

Additionally, the Legislature should mitigate cuts to early learning programs in the General Fund and prioritize targeted equity investments such as the Early Learning Equity Fund, and Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE), which are uniquely designed to serve children and families who are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Support Educators

Helping students sustain strong, supportive relationships with their teachers is critical to children’s mental health and learning—especially when the pandemic is compounding the sustained trauma of systemic racism. Research has also shown Black, Indigenous, and educators of color as well as bilingual educators are best positioned to support historically underserved children while nurturing inclusive, cross-cultural relationships that benefit all students.¹



To ensure we don’t fall backward in Oregon’s push to grow and support a diverse educator workforce that reflects our student population, we must:

- Continue investing in the **Educator Advancement Council (EAC)** as a statewide strategy that ensures all teachers—especially teachers of color—can tailor their professional development and support networks to these unprecedented times.
- Continue investing in the **EAC’s Regional Educator Networks** to provide educators with the resources to **innovate and adapt to distance learning**, particularly in rural Oregon.
- Collaborate with school districts and labor unions to ensure any necessary layoffs **do not disproportionately impact educators of color.**

¹ Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Ensure Continuity of Learning During COVID-19

Historically underserved children and families are disproportionately bearing the brunt of this crisis and more likely to face barriers to access distance learning. Loss of learning, mental health challenges, economic instability, and sustained trauma as a result of racism are contributing to significantly worse outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and children of color. To mitigate the impact of this crisis and set our state up for a strong and equitable recovery, we must:



- Ensure that federal CARES Act funds and other state or federal relief funds are leveraged heavily and targeted to **support children with the greatest needs**, and that **culturally responsive supports** are delivered in partnership with community-based organizations.
- Use Oregon reserve funds to address near-term budget gaps. This includes **transferring no less than \$300 million from the Education Stability Fund to the State School Fund** for school district investment, and urging school districts to direct resources to reach children with the greatest need for support.
- Support state-level leadership and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to **hold school districts accountable** for students' continuity of learning, mental and social-emotional health, and physical health and safety.
- Continue to invest in **summer learning grants for Title I schools** (an SSA statewide initiative) to mitigate learning loss.

Reinforce Oregon's Commitment to Equity in Education

Oregon must advance critical statewide strategies that ensure school districts and communities across the state are moving in tandem to support an equitable recovery for children. It will be critical for legislators to address near-term needs while laying a pathway to create a stronger education system for Oregon's children.



Specifically, it is critical that the Legislature:

- **Formally charge an inclusive and diverse work group** to develop recommendations for **maximizing equity, alignment, sufficiency, and stability across Oregon's public education funding mechanisms**—including the State School Fund and the Student Investment Account—in advance of the 2021 legislative session. Now is the time for state, local, and community leaders to come together and redesign the foundational elements of a public education system that supports every child to learn, grow, and thrive.
- Honor the promise to **invest 50% of available SSA funds in the Student Investment Account** as the best mechanism for investing in equity and cultivating community engagement. School districts and communities worked intensely throughout the last year to develop local plans that advance equity and provide the social-emotional supports that students desperately need. The targeted strategies outlined in these plans are an important compass for districts' future investments.

- Continue investing in and supporting implementation of **Oregon's Statewide Equity Plans** in the SSA's Statewide Initiative Account. These plans are a vital avenue for self-determination, supporting Black, Indigenous, and communities of color to design culturally specific strategies and address systemic inequities in public education:
 - **African American / Black Student Success Plan** – \$10 million (\$6.23 million funded by the General Fund; \$3.81 million funded by the SSA)
 - **Latino Student Success Plan** – \$1 million (funded by the SSA)
 - **American Indian / Alaska Native Student Success Plan** – \$3.19 million (funded by the SSA)
- Fully fund **targeted equity investments** that support Oregon's federally recognized tribes, including:
 - **Tribal Attendance Promising Practices** – \$1.61 million (funded by the General Fund)
 - **Senate Bill 13 Implementation** – \$1.8 million (funded by the General Fund)
- Lay the groundwork to fund and implement Oregon's recently released **LGBTQ2SIA+ Student Success Plan**. Enacting the recommendations in this plan is essential to ensuring all children feel safe and supported as they learn and grow, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation.