



*Testimony to the  
Oregon Legislature Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education*

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*Thursday, July 23, 2020*

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair McLain, members of the committee: My name is Amanda Manjarrez and I am the Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs at Foundations for a Better Oregon, also known as Chalkboard Project.

Chalkboard Project is a nonprofit organization jointly led by a coalition of Oregon's largest philanthropic foundations. Working primarily at the state level, we collaborate with impacted communities and policymakers to analyze, develop, and advocate for policies and public investments that ensure every child in Oregon can learn, grow, and thrive.

As you all know, the Student Success Act was a landmark achievement for this legislature not only because it increased investments in education but because it targeted resources toward addressing the root causes of inequities across Oregon's education system.

Now, in these unprecedented times, it's clear that we can't afford to invest in everything the SSA envisioned. What's equally clear is that now's the time to reaffirm Oregon's commitment to equity and hold ourselves accountable to serving children who are disproportionately bearing the brunt of this crisis.

First, we want to thank you for prioritizing SSA investments in early learning, and we must still protect critical infrastructure like Early Learning Hubs to expand access for every child. We also applaud your support for the statewide equity plans, mental health initiatives, and the Educator Advancement Council's investments in a diverse educator workforce.

But, we are deeply concerned about diverting Student Investment Account funds from the SSA to close other funding gaps. The Student Investment Account was built on two critical concepts: First, that underserved students, their families, and their teachers know best what support they need; and second, that targeted investments in underserved students make the system stronger for all students.

When we are forced to do more with less, it's always the equity and accountability investments that fall by the wayside. Since the SSA was passed, thousands of students, families and teachers felt new hope as they engaged in district budget processes. Diverting Corporate Activity Tax funds and further reducing the Student Investment Account to \$150 million—only one-third of

what was originally promised—will signal that their voices are less important than holding school districts accountable to their needs. It begs the question of whether Oregon’s commitment to equity is real.

We’re grateful to see the Legislature prioritize children by drawing on reserve funds to avoid deeper cuts. But in this biennium and beyond, we must reckon with the fact that Black, Indigenous, and other children of color are bearing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and prolonged school closures on top of the sustained trauma of systemic racism in our schools.

The budget challenges we are facing today will not disappear next biennium. **That’s why we are calling for the Legislature to create a work group consisting of legislators, impacted communities, and stakeholders to courageously redesign how our state funds education. Rather than continuing with a patchwork of programs and funds, we need a coherent, stable, and aligned system designed to promote equity and improve outcomes statewide.** A return to the status quo is impossible and we simply cannot continue our decades-long habit of treating Oregon’s equity investments as expendable.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today. I’d be happy to answer any questions.

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