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# Increasing Basic School Support Fund by Annual Tax Levy

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### **Report** on

# INCREASING BASIC SCHOOL SUPPORT FUND BY ANNUAL TAX LEVY

PURPOSE: Levying annual state property tax outside the 6 per cent limitation in amount as will produce \$30 per capita in addition to the levy previously authorized for \$50 per capita for children within state between ages of four and twenty years, according to latest school census compiled by the superintendent of public instruction. Such tax shall be included in the state levy fiscal year, beginning with the year 1951-52, and be apportioned, collected and paid as other state taxes, and shall be placed by state treasurer in basic school support fund, to be expended and legally disbursed.

306 YES

307 NO

To the Board of Governors The City Club of Portland:

Your committee has been assigned the task of reporting upon the referendum measure providing for an anuual state property tax outside the 6 per cent limitation, in an amount which will add \$30 to the \$50 per capita authorized by the 1946 Basic School Support Law.

In considering this measure your committee interviewed Mr. Rex Putnam, State Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Cecil W. Posey, Executive Secretary, Oregon Education Association; Mrs. Louise Humphrey of Oregon Business and Tax Research, Inc.; Mr. C. C. Chapman, Editor of the Oregon Voter; Mr. Kelley Loe of the Oregon State Federation of Labor; Dr. Carl Huffaker, Professor of Education, University of Oregon; Mr. Dale Ickes, Superintendent of Elementary Schools, Milwaukie District; Mr. Don Campbell, Superintendent of Schools, Parkrose District; Mrs. A. N. Green, Legislative Chairman, Oregon Congress of Parents and Teachers; and Mrs. S. W. Meserve, Oregon Children's Bill Committee, Portland, Oregon. The committee also examined campaign literature published by sponsors of the bill and relevant portions of the September 1950 Study of Public Elementary and Secondary Education in Oregon prepared under the direction of Dr. T. C. Holy, Professor of Education, Ohio State University, pursuant to House Joint Resolution No. 27, adopted April 22, 1949.

#### **Basic School Support Law**

In 1946 a committee of the City Club reported to the membership on the original measure to create a Basic School Support Fund through imposition of an annual tax levy sufficient to produce \$50 per capita for each child within the state between the ages of four and twenty years according to the latest school census. The bill received the approval of the voters (157,904 to 151,765) in the November, 1946, election. The Basic School Support Law had several excellent objectives:

- 1. To improve and support the public elementary and secondary schools of the state.
- 2. To equalize school district taxes from the state level;
- 3. To provide special apportionments to schools for transportation and special education, and
- 4. To provide a periodic study of the public schools.

The current measure does not alter any of the foregoing objectives, but is designed solely to increase the degree of state participation from \$50 to \$80 per capita for each child within the state between the ages of four and twenty years. Income tax revenues are applied to offset the tax. Furthermore, the 2 mill elementary tax cannot be levied nor can any transfer to the state school support fund (or apportionment therefrom) be made for any year for which the basic tax is levied and no part of the fund can be apportioned as an offset to a school district tax levy or to a county school fund.

Pursuant to directions contained in the Basic School Support Law, the 1947 legislature provided for the apportionment of this fund. The law provides that "there shall be apportioned to each of the several public school districts of the state that meets all requirements imposed upon schools by law and maintains and operates a standard school, as defined by the rules and regulations of the State Board of Education, the following sums:

- 1. \$500 per teacher employed.
- 2. 20 cents for each day's membership of resident pupils.
- 3. 5 cents for each day's membership, by which the total day's membership of all pupils fails to give an average of 2800 days' membership per teacher employed."

The law contains a provision for an apportionment to non-operating and suspended school districts, and school districts furnishing transportation to pupils or board and room in lieu of transportation. The so-called equalization apportionment is made to the eligible school districts in an amount equal to the difference between the cost of the basic school program (as defined in the statute) of the districts and the sums received from the abovementioned Basic School Support Fund, the county school fund (exclusive of land sales portions thereof) and a district tax of not less than seven mills (including the county school fund levy) on the full cash value of taxable property. Any remaining sums in the basic fund are apportioned among the several districts on the basis of resident days membership. For the purpose of computing the equalization apportionment the statute defines the cost of the basic school program as the lesser of the following: (1) 75c for each day's membership of resident pupils, (2) the district's expenditures for operating purposes during the year, or (3) \$2100.00 per teacher employed. The following table (Holy Report, p. 365) shows the distribution of the fund for the school years 1947-1948 through 1950-1951.

Formula	194	8-49	194	7-48	194	9-50	1950-51			
ltems	Amt.*	Percent	Amt.*	Percent	Amt.*	Percent	Amt.*	Percent		
20c per day/pupil	\$7,078	45.1	\$7,273	44.1	\$7,761	46.5	\$8,319	<b>46.6</b>		
\$500 per teacher	4,303	27.4	4,452	27.0	4,728	28.4	5,122	28.7		
Teacher Load Bonus	27	0.2	22	0.1	20	0.1	20	0.1		
Transportation	1,272	8.1	1,504	9.1	1,104	6.6	1,286	7.2		
Equalization	3,024	19.2	3,251	19.7	3,062	18.4	3,118	17.4		
	\$15,704	99.9	\$16,502	100.0	\$16,675	100.0	\$17,865	100.0		

\*Amounts are expressed to the nearest thousand.

If the voters approve the increase in the basic school fund tax, the amount of the increase will be placed in the Basic School Support Fund and apportioned accordingly.

#### **Principal School Funds**

The following table (Holy Report, p. 362) shows the sources of school revenues for the year 1948-1949:

	SOURCES		Amount	Percent of Total
I.	FEDERAL SOURCES			
	Vocational Education Fund		188,302	.29
	School Lunch Fund		507,757	.77
	Forest Reserve Fund		417,407	.64
	Indian Education Fund		27,574	.04
	Total from Federal Sources	.\$ 1	,141,040	1.74
П.	STATE SOURCES			
	Irreducible School Fund	. \$	235,659	.36
	Basic School Support Fund		.563.425	25.26
	State and County School Fund			5.17
	Vocational Education Fund		122,888	.19
	Total from State Sources	. \$20	,312,752	30.98
III.	COUNTY SOURCES			
	County School and School Library Fund	. \$	294,568	.45
	Total from County Sources	. \$	294,568	.45
IV.	LOCAL SOURCES			
	Local Taxes	. \$43	,820,844	66.83
	Total from Local Sources	\$43	,820,844	66.83
	TOTAL	. \$65	,569,204	100.00

#### Findings

Proponents of the measure argue that the increase from \$50 to \$80 per child is mandatory in view of (1) the increase in operating costs experienced by the schools in recent years, and (2) the anticipated tremendous growth in school populations during the next 10 years. Little attention need be given to statistics reflecting operating cost increases experienced in recent years, for all well informed citizens concede the validity of the argument.

Your committee has given careful attention to the proponents' statistics reflecting a close correlation between Oregon's increasing birth rate and the number of school children requiring education in our public school system. On the basis of reasonable forecasts predicated on Oregon's increased immigration and birth rate, we must anticipate a substantial growth in our school system during the next ten years. The trend of Oregon's population as well as the growth of the Portland area is illustrated by the following:

	POPUL	
Year	Oregon	Portland
1930	. 953,786	301,815
1940	.1,089,684	305,394
1950	.1,476,047	371,011

On the basis of the foregoing increases and on the birth and school population correlations, education authorities are forecasting that there will be an increase in elementary school attendance of 81 percent, and of high school attendnce of 78 percent, by 1960. The 35.5 percent increase in population in Oregon in the past decade is second only to California among the Pacific Coast states.

Although basic school funds were not intended for capital expenditures, they release locally levied funds for such purposes. Conceding the population growth, we must recognize the need for capital expansion programs for the schools. It is estimated that by 1960 there will be 8,011 additional classrooms needed in Oregon to accommodate increased enrollments and replace old classrooms. At the approximate current cost of \$20,000 per classroom, this will require an expenditure of \$160,220,000. Fifty-four percent of Oregon's classrooms were constructed prior to 1930, and 26 percent prior to 1920. School costs have more than doubled since 1941, while there has been an increase in assessed valuation of property in Oregon of only 60 percent. The ability of school districts to finance new buildings has therefore been materially lessened.

Oregon's economic growth has been rapid during the last ten years as is reflected in the following percentage increases (O.E.A. Research Department) in certain phases of business and production from 1939 to 1947:

	Perce	nt of Increase bet		
	Oregon	Washington	California U	nited States
Number of industrial establishments	61.6	19.3	52.6	38.5
Number of production workers	57.3	50.1	91.7	52.6
Amount of wages to production workers	282.0	227.7	323.5	236.1
Average annual wage of production workers	139.8	118.2	120.9	120.3
Value added by manufacture	330.7	226.5	255.8	203.9

In spite of Oregon's current economic growth, the citizens of the state have not expended in recent years the same percentage of their combined incomes as they did in former years for the support of public education.

TOTAL EXPENDITURES FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, TOTAL INCOME AND PERCENT THAT EXPENDITURES ARE OF INCOME IN OREGON (O.E.A. Figures) 1938-39 TO 1948-49

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		Τc	ota	E	Exp	en	dit	U	re	5			
				-	1 1 1							-	

	Total Expenditures for Public Schools (in Thousands)	Total Income (in Millions)	Percent of Total Income Expended for Public Schools
1938-39	\$18,886	\$ 540	3.50%
1939-40	18,581	587	3.17
1940-41	18,369	633	2.90
1941-42	19,191	824	2.33
1942-43	19,000	1,201	1.58
1943-44	22,545	1,599	1.41
1944-45	26,392	1,672	1.58
1945-46	30,420	1,671	1.82
1946-47	36,658	1,777	2.06
1947-48	48,760	1,984	2.46
1948-49	58,161	2,134	2.73

In 1947 Oregon had a per capita income of \$6,865 per child of school age as compared with \$6,436 for the nation. This average gave Oregon a rank of 15 among the states. In comparing state incomes with expenditures on schools, the rating of the eleven Western states is as follows:

- 1. New Mexico
- 2. Arizona
- 3. Utah 4. Montana
- 5. Idaho

- 6. Wyoming 7. Washington
- 8. Oregon
- 9. Nevada
- 10. Colorado
- 11. California

From the standpoint of national averages, Oregon ranks 20th among the states in the percent of income it devotes to current expenditures for public schools.

In 1947-48, the latest year for which comparative data are available, Oregon teachers were paid 10th best in the nation although still below Washington and California. In the 1949-50 year the average salary for elementary teachers was \$3,163 and for high school teachers \$3,841.

In support of the argument of the proponents that the State of Oregon should have a greater participation in financing public education, the proponents schedule the percent of state participation by Western states as follows:

New Mexico	84%
Washington	65
California	
Utah	40
Nevada	40
Arizona	37
Oregon	31
Wyoming	
Colorado	

However, the connection between the amount of the state aid and the level of support for schools is not definite. Some states with high expenditures have small percentages of state support, and many states with high percentages of state aid have a low level of support.

At the present time it is estimated that Oregon's current expense per pupil amounts to \$250 as compared with \$250 for Washington and \$252 for California. Nevertheless the average teacher salaries for 1949-50 compared as follows:

California	•	•	٠	•	•		•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	.:	\$3,	,94	0
Washingto	n		•						•	•				•				•	•		•	•	•		З,	37	5
Oregon		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	3,	27	5

For many years the first class school districts of the state have been forced to ask the voters for permission to exceed the 6% tax limitation. The tendency is illustrated by the percentage figures of the first class school districts forced to exceed the 6% limitation:

47%	in 1944-45
63	in 1945-46
87	in 1946-47
58	in 1947-48
87	in 1948-49
100	in 1949-50

The Basic School Support Law levies a real property tax which in the past has been offset by surplus income tax revenues. According to the report of State Budget Director Harry Dorman, if the Soldiers' Bonus and Basic School Support increases are not approved the state deficit will be \$15,028,844.79 on June 30, 1952 and \$34,853,637.96 on June 30, 1953. If both measures are approved the deficit will be \$26,103,637.96 on June 30, 1952, and \$61,092,492.13 on June 30, 1953.

The following conclusions are warranted:

- 1. The past few years have seen substantial increases in the cost of education.
- 2. Conservative estimates indicate a rapid growth in school population during the next ten years, increasing operating costs and the need for capital expansion.

- 3. Oregon compares favorably with Washington and California in the amount per school child spent on education.
- 4. There is no definite relationship between the percentage of state participation in educational costs and the actual amount spent on public schools.
- 5. During the last few years an increasing number of first class school districts have been forced to exceed the 6% limitation.
- 6. The entire Basic School Support tax might possibly result in a levy on real property for the state faces deficits during the 1951-1953 biennium.

#### **Holy Report**

The Holy report is a comprehensive study of public elementary and secondary education in Oregon. The study was financed from the Basic School Support Fund and portions of the report are highly germane to the proposal for increasing state aid. Dr. T. C. Holy makes the following points which your committee believes are of particular importance in considering the pending measure:

1. Oregon has made progress in the job of equalizing the support of public schools. It is recognized by all authorities in school finance that it is an obligation of the state to guarantee to all children residing in the state, wherever they may live, a satisfactory program of education. It is also recognized that the burden of the support of this program should rest equally on all the tax-paying ability of the state, and that the state should allow the school districts freedom to go beyond the satisfactory minimum program guaranteed to all children if they so desire. School districts should feel a responsibility for the welfare of the children entrusted to them and be free to give them the best possible educational opportunity.

2. The equalization level of 75c per day of membership provided for in the Basic School Support Law should be raised to \$1.10 per day, the level at which a large majority of the districts are grouped. If the \$30 increase is voted it will require \$2,500,000 of the additional \$11,054,850 which will be raised, to bring up the schools which are below the present average equalization level of \$1.15 per day. If the increase is not approved the recommended equalization level of \$1.10 per day can be achieved by increasing the required rate of legal level to participate in equalization from the present 7 mills to approximately 17 mills.

3. Generous support alone will not assure good schools. The plan of organization which should be developed by the state may be as significant as any other factor in determining how the schools are to develop and what opportunities are to be provided for the children.

4. The fact that there are so many small and inadequate districts handicaps the work and increases the expense and responsibilities of the State Department of Education and greatly augments the school operating expenses per pupil.

5. The present complex system results in many citizens being in at least three school districts, viz: elementary, union high or non-high and rural.

6. In some districts small secondary schools are maintained at an excessive cost, with the result of starving the elementary schools in order that these small uneconomical and inefficient secondary schools can be continued.

7. Some districts are almost 500 times as wealthy as others. If the state re-organized on county units rather than in districts the ratio of 500 to 1 would be reduced to 8 to 1.

8. During the period 1937-38 to 1948-49, inclusive, the total number of districts has decreased from 2,114 to 1,250. However, in some instances the decline has not resulted in the greatest of adequate administrative units but has only brought together two or three units which, even though consolidated, constitute too small a unit to provide an adequate answer to the problems of school unit organization.

9. Small districts are reluctant to consolidate. Pursuant to a 1939 law county committees developed re-organization plans calling for elimination of 243 of more than 2100 small districts in the state. The law provided that any district dissatisfied with the reorganization could vote itsef out, and all 243 did just that.

10. It is agreed that all aids to the maintenance of small and ineffective local school administrative and attendance units should be discontinued. In many states study has revealed that there is a considerable number of laws which encourage the small district or the inefficient organization to continue. Many of the aids are not recognized. For example, in a number of states citizens hving in a non-high school district have found that they can secure educational opportunity at the secondary level for their children more

cheaply through staying outside of a district which maintains a high school and through sending their children to that high school on a tuition basis. In others, a rather large state subsidy to each one-room school, without regard to enrollment, has encouraged keeping schools in existence which cannot be justified. All such aids to inadequate and inefficient local school administrative and attendance units must be removed if an adequate reorganization program is to be carried forward.

11. Reorganization of the small district system is strongly recommended and it is urged that the new districts be adequate in size and in assessed valuation to provide and maintain a program of education at reasonable cost.

12. The plan of reorganization should include the discontinuance of suspended, nonhigh school, union high school and rural school districts.

#### **Proponents' Arguments**

Proponents of the measure believe that state school support must be increased over that provided by the Basic School Support Law if present educational standards in this state are to be maintained in the face of the rapid increase in school population anticipated during the ensuing decade, with accompanying increase in school costs. The arguments advanced in support of this measure are in many respects similar to those advanced in support of the Basic School Support Law. Proponents contend that the increased levy is necessary to accomplish the following purposes:

1. To equalize educational opportunities in the state by providing funds to assist all schools in maintaining minimum educational standards. Inequalities of wealth exist between the various counties and school districts of the state, and standards of education are widely divergent because of varying abilities of school districts to finance a sound educational program. Increasing state school support offers a partial solution to this problem and implements the provision of the State Constitution which specifies:

"The legislative assembly shall provide by law for the establishment of a uniform and general system of common schools."

2. To improve the standards of instruction and physical facilities of Oregon schools.

3. To stabilize the financial structure of elementary and secondary schools, thereby promoting retention of well trained school staffs and encouraging capable individuals to enter the teaching profession.

4. To enable school districts to undertake long term planning and to eliminate the financial uncertainty occasioned by the periodic necessity of holding annual special elections to vote funds in excess of the constitutional 6% limitation.

5. To aid in restoring the balance of state aid which voters intended to establish by means of the Basic School Law. When passed by the people in 1946 the Basic School Support Law was intended to furnish approximately 50% state aid, but due to increased population and rising school costs state aid has been reduced to approximately 30% at the present time. The principle of permanent state school support was established by the voters in 1946 under the Basic School Support Law. The proposed increased levy will assist in accomplishing the original purpose of the Basic School Support Law in re-establishing the intended percentage of state aid to Oregon Schools.

6. To provide state funds for education and thereby relieve local school district taxpayers from the full burden of meeting increased school costs through imposition of a direct property tax by the respective school districts. State school support is not confined to a tax on property, but can be financed from income tax revenues and by such other methods as the legislature may determine. A direct property tax, however, is the only source of revenue available to the counties and local school districts. State support provides the means by which all the people in the state will share in school costs.

7. In comparison with other states Oregon ranks low in state aid.

Among the organizations endorsing the bill are the following:

- 1. Oregon State Grange
- 2. Young Republicans
- 3. The Democratic State Central Committee
- 4. Oregon Congress of Parents and Teachers
- 5. Oregon Education Association
- 6. Oregon Association of University Women
- 7. C.I.O.
- 8. The Oregon Farmers Union
- 9. The Young Democrats

10. The American Legion

- 11. The American Legion Auxiliary
- 12. Oregon Federation Women's Clubs
- 13. The Oregonian.

#### **Opponents'** Arguments

The arguments against the measure are in some respects similar to those advanced in 1946 in opposition to the Basic School Support Law. Some of the arguments of the opponents are as follows:

1. The bill inflicts a tax burden of approximately \$12,000,000 a year to start with, rising year by year with the increase in the school census to \$15,000,000 a year and thence on upwards. This will absorb all the remaining income tax revenues upon which the financing of the state budget depends. By depriving the state budget of this revenue the approval of this measure will increase the state deficit by approximately \$24,000,000 during the first biennium. The legislature has no power to impose taxes to replenish the state budget without consent of the people. Until the people vote taxes adequate to support the regular state budget, all measures to increase state expenditure should be defeated.

2. The measure is not equalization but is subsidization of ineffective and expensive district organization. Adoption of the bill will perpetuate this condition, which is the greatest obstacle to improvement of the school system.

3. Increased state aid at the expense of the larger districts is most likely to affect adversely the preponderant majority of pupils by denying a great many of the larger systems adequate funds to maintain or extend educational efforts.

4. The Basic School Support Law of 1946 has not fulfilled the representations of its proponents in that:

(a) Every child has not had and cannot have an equal educational opportunity for the quality of education cannot depend on money spent per pupil. An equal amount of money spent per pupil in a one-room rural school in a small Oregon town and in a metropolitan center, cannot produce equality of educational opportunity.

(b) The 1946 Basic School Support Law has failed to eliminate the uncertainty of year to year financing. School financing at the present time has never been more uncertain and every major school system has had to rely on special levies to maintain its educational program.

(c) Special levies required in addition to state support have fallen on property and on no other tax source. The proposed increase in state aid will undoubtedly result in a state property tax in addition to the state income tax levy and various local levies which will have to be continued.

(d) The quality of education in Oregon is high, and few states at the present time spend as much per pupil on education as does Oregon.

5. The proposed measure constitutes a further encroachment on the principle of local sovereignty in taxation and budgeting by promoting the centralization of authority in the hands of state agencies. It takes public finance further away from localities which are most familiar with immediate actual needs, thereby creating an undue risk of extravagance in expenditures.

6. The proposed measure carries further the practice already established of taxing some districts to pay the school costs of other districts. There was some reason in 1946 to bring a measure of equalization to various districts. There is no valid reason to carry it further.

7. Once the policy of increased state aid is followed a risk is created of loss of local control by the various districts through the device of standards prescribed by centralized state authority in remitting state largess to local school boards. Moreover, state authorities may determine not only what local boards will do with state largess, but also what must be done with funds raised by local assessments.

8. The measure gives schools a prior claim on public funds ahead of any other purpose. Although schools are a foundation of our democratic institutions, they deserve no priority of treatment.

Opposition to the measure has been expressed by the following:

- 1. S. Eugene Allen, Editor, Oregon Labor Press, member of Portland School Board.
- 2. Albert R. Bullier, former member of Portland School Board.
- 3. James T. Marr, Executive Secretary of Oregon State Federation of Labor.

- 4. Milo K. McIver, present member, State Highway Commission, President Commerce Investment Company and former member Portland School Board.
- 5. Oregon Voter.
- 6. The Oregon Journal,

#### Summary

Your committee is of the opinion that the following basic findings are justified:

1. The principle of state aid to provide minimum educational standards for all children is accepted and is sound.

2. Oregon population has reflected a heavy growth during the last ten years and conservative estimates predict a continuation of this growth. Oregon birth statistics of the last few years forecast an immediate and essential need for expansion of school facilities.

3. Operating costs of the schools, as for all other forms of business activity, have increased substantially during the last decade, and will probably continue to increase during the foreseeable future.

4. The increase in school population and the increase in operating and capital outlays necessitate additional funds if the quality of education in Oregon is to be maintained on a satisfactory level.

5. There is a wide disparity between the assessed valuations of the various school districts throughout the state. This variance frequently results in financial hardships on the property owners residing within low-valuation districts, or inequalities in educational opportunities in those districts.

6. Reorganization of the district school system is imperative for the purpose not only of improving school administration and standards but also for the purpose of assisting in solving school financial problems.

7. Credit must be given to some of the arguments of the opponents but in their entirety they do not lead to the conclusion that the measure should be disapproved.

(a) All surplus tax revenues will be absorbed. This forecast was also made in 1946 when the original bill was studied. The predication has proved itself erroneous as well it might in the future. Even if the prediction is sound it does not warrant a denial of further state aid.

(b) The measure subsidizes and perpetuates inefficient districts.

The educational leaders have made real progress in the last few years in the elimination of inefficient districts and have pledged themselves to a continuation of this effort. No substantial evidence has been presented to the committee that additional state aid will deter the further consolidation of districts.

#### Conclusion

It is the opinion of your committee that we must either concede or deny the need of additional funds for education. The facts insist without refutation that we must face squarely the issue of providing more funds. They can be raised either by the respective districts, some poor and some wealthy, or by the citizens of the state pooling their joint resources to make education and its financing a common problem. The obligation of the state to provide a minimum education program justifies the \$30 increase at this time.

#### Recommendation

Your committee therefore recommends that the City Club go on record as favoring the increase in the Basic School Support Fund and that the vote be 306 X YES.

Respectfully submitted,

GEORGE B. CAMPBELL

#### PETER TWIST JAY R. WILSON

RICHARD DEVERS, Chairman

Approved by Ed F. Averill, Section Chairman, Legislation and Elections, for transmittal to the Board, October 26, 1950. Received by the Board of Governors October 30, 1950, and ordered printed and submitted to the membership for discussion and action.