

Kitzhaber calls for reform of Oregon school funding board

Governor's order would construct single entity to oversee state-funded education transitions

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In an effort to fix Oregon's dysfunctional school funding system, Governor John Kitzhaber is calling for sweeping education reform and the consolidation of governing power into a single board overseeing preschool through college.

Kitzhaber's plan, issued Feb. 11, would create an Oregon Education Investment Board, which will be designed by a newly fashioned 12-member investment team appointed last week. The board would command 51 percent of the state's general education fund and appropriate money to schools based on educational performance, breaking the decades-old paradigm of more money for greater enrollment.

By replacing the Oregon Board of Education that governs grades K-12 and the State Board of Higher Education, which oversees the state's seven public universities, Kitzhaber said he hopes the new

board will create a more seamless transition between grades.

In addition, the governor sees his plan as a necessary step in meeting a standard widely adopted by state bureaucrats in recent years known as the 40-40-20 goal. The goal strives for 40 percent of Oregonians earning a four-year college degree, 40 percent earning a post-high school certificate and 20 percent earning a high school diploma or equivalent by 2025.

Kitzhaber's education advisor, Nancy Golden, said the reform plan will focus on "leverage points" — turbulent transition periods between certain grades where students frequently encounter pitfalls. Entering preschoolers, ninth-graders and college freshmen will receive particular attention, Golden said, because fostering success during those first years at new schools can bolster high school graduation and college freshman retention rates. Also, by ensuring students' needs and performance goals are met early on, the governor hopes to minimize remediation costs by examining achievement scores more closely.

"These are the key leverage points to get the best return on (our) investment," said Golden, who is on professional leave from her role

as Springfield School District superintendent. "(We will) be saving a bunch of money on remediation."

By creating a performance-based education system where academic success is paramount to credit load, the new system aims to give students more moving room. For example, since funding will no longer hinge on the number of occupied desks, a high school junior performing at a post-secondary level could move on to college because the school district — currently paid per student — would no longer have an incentive to stall his or her graduation.

"There are kids in 11th grade who could be in community college right now," Golden said.

How the governor's plan will affect the host of higher education bills currently moving through the state legislature has yet to be determined. Golden said the plan is sympathetic to the Oregon



JOHN KITZHABER
OREGON GOVERNOR

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University System and University President Richard Lariviere's pushes for greater university autonomy; their respective restructuring proposals are now being appraised in Salem. At the same time, Kitzhaber still wants to retain some authority over higher education provisions.

"There are things he wants to still have a say in," Golden said. "He doesn't want tuition

(rates) completely left up to the local university boards."

Oregon University System spokesperson Diane Saunders said Kitzhaber has endorsed the system's proposed bill, but didn't know whether the governor plans to dismantle the State Board of Higher Education — OUS's 12-member statutory governing board — or assimilate it into the new Education Investment Board.

"We have been told that the governor supports OUS's governance reform efforts," Saunders said. "We have heard that it's too early to know whether Board would be dissolved, and that the initial design team will be looking at that."

ASUO President Amelie Rousseau views the governor's efforts as progressive, retaining

in the end, Kitzhaber's plan will be cut from a similar cloth as former President George W.



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NANCY GOLDEN
EDUCATION ADVISOR

a necessary degree of governmental control over Oregon higher education that the New Partnership hopes to expunge.

"It's going to add another level of bureaucracy, which the University doesn't like," Rousseau said. "Students see it as adding another level of accountability."

Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, but Golden said the extent to which Oregon's contemporary education funding reform echoes the controversial, decade-old Bush-era plan is indeterminable this early in the process.

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