

## **ST. HELENS SCHOOL DISTRICT #503 – 2023-2024 BUDGET MESSAGE**

In accordance with ORS 394.391, I am submitting to you the proposed 2023-2024 budget for the St. Helens School District.

It is a pleasure to serve as Superintendent of the St. Helens School District. I want to thank all those that have put in the exceptionally difficult work to build a budget that continues to be underfunded by the state yet stays true to our district's core values, mission, and vision for the children of our community.

School Districts across the United States saw an infusion of money to support students through the pandemic and transition back to a new normal. Oregon in particular encouraged school districts to use the money to add staff and help lessen the impact of distance learning during the pandemic. As a school district we utilized our funding to add staff, HVAC and technology to schools knowing that if we invested entirely in staff we would need to make a major correction once the funding was exhausted. The money has ended and it is now time to make a bit of a correction. Oregon has the largest education rainy-day fund in state history and with a small portion of the fund it could help smooth the transition back to post pandemic funding while leaving billions for the future. Unfortunately, the legislature is not willing to tap into the fund at this time. Although it might not be raining, it is certainly drizzling with a majority of Oregon school districts reducing staff, cutting programs or days.

Across the State of Oregon, year in and year out, school districts are provided with just enough to get by in a good year and forced to make draconian cuts in bad years. We have a system where State Economists calculate a 2% rollup cost for school districts to operate on while legislators fail to question the allocation in the face of unprecedented inflation and staff shortages that require significantly more funding just to maintain current programs. Wonderful targeted funds such as the Student Investment Account and the High School Success Grant that were passed to change the face of education in Oregon by providing lower class sizes, social emotional support and other innovative programs, more often than not, are consumed to fill the basic function of schools and have lost most of the promise they once held.

The Governor's proposed budget of \$9.9 billion for the 2023-2025 biennium does not adequately fund schools to meet the needs of our student population. We have stretched our budget and readjusted staffing allocations to provide the best quality experience for St. Helens students. We have continued our curriculum adoption cycle by purchasing new materials and staff will continue to provide the best possible instruction to our students. I am hopeful that the Oregon Legislature will act and provide a financial umbrella when they hear school districts from across Oregon ask for help.

On behalf of the staff and our community, we express our appreciation for the members of the 2023-2024 District Budget Committee and for the time each of you have committed to help create exceptional schools for all students.

Respectfully submitted by,  
*Scot A. Stockwell*  
St. Helens Superintendent