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## Education proposals receive lukewarm response

By Tracy Loew  
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Gov. Ted Kulongoski's Reset Cabinet recommends major changes to Oregon's education system, from preschool through college.

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**Video:** <http://www.statesmanjournal.com/live>">Watch a replay of Gov. Kulongoski's speech at the Portland City Club

**Read the report:** <http://www.statesmanjournal.com/assets/pdf/J0160072625.PDF>">Reset Cabinet's recommendations

**Speech:** <http://www.statesmanjournal.com/assets/pdf/J0160074625.PDF>"> Read Gov. Kulongoski's speech as prepared for delivery

**Website:** [http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/governor\\_reset\\_cabinet/reset\\_state\\_govt.shtml](http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/governor_reset_cabinet/reset_state_govt.shtml)">Governor Kulongoski's Reset Cabinet website

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But the plans are drawing a lukewarm reaction from education leaders.

"It's a rehash of a lot of old ideas that have been tested in the Legislature and either didn't make it or have been successful and are underway," said Chuck Bennett, director of government relations for the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators.

"It looks like the Governor has chosen to exploit the economic challenges we're facing to push an agenda that doesn't make any sense," said Gail Rasmussen, president of the Oregon Education Association, which represents many of the state's teachers.

Among the proposals:

- Legislatively mandate that education service districts take over specified school district functions — including business, accounting, information technology, transportation, human services and special education — by July 1, 2012. Then statutorily dissolve existing ESDs and create a new structure of fewer regional service providers by June 30, 2014. Establish a new, bond-funded, statewide financial and student data reporting system. Consolidate small school districts, and combine the superintendent function in districts of 500 students or less into a single county superintendent.

Lawmakers put ESD reform on hold earlier this year to await the reset cabinet's recommendations. The new proposal runs counter to Senate Education Committee Chairman Mark Hass' push to allow school districts to opt out of all ESD services. Hass, D-Beaverton, could not be reached for comment Friday.

- Cut funding for the Oregon University System by 15 percent in the 2011-13 budget. In return, universities would be given more flexibility to manage revenue and costs, including converting from line-item to block grant funding from the state. A similar proposal for restructuring the university system already is under consideration by the State Board of Higher Education.

Kevin Glidden, communications director for the Oregon Student Association, said the 15 percent cut would balance the budget on students' backs.

"A budget shortfall doesn't make educating Oregonians any less important," he said.

-Move to statewide or regional collective bargaining for schoolteachers and align compensation increases with those projected for similar jobs in the private sector. The politically powerful Oregon Education Association opposes both proposals.

-Create and support a statewide public virtual learning system, and require every district to provide access to it if the district does not have its own option. Last session, the Legislature moved to limit the growth of for-profit online charter schools.

-Implement elements of the state's failed Race to the Top grant application, including allowing state intervention in Oregon's five lowest-performing schools and linking student assessments with teacher evaluations.

-Expand options for high school students to earn college credits.

-Reform the Oregon Opportunity Grant program, which helps low-income students afford college, to prevent over-commitments.

-Make the state Superintendent of Public Instruction a position appointed by the governor, rather than elected by voters, and increase the salary for the position.

The state school fund accounts for about 40 percent of Oregon's general fund budget. Community colleges, universities and other education make up another 12 percent.

Kulongoski said discussion must focus on outcomes, rather than spending.

"We must end our practice of evaluating the success of our education system based solely on how much money it receives," he said. "We must stop claiming political victories based on a budget number. Money is not an outcome — it's a means to achieve that outcome."

But COSA's Bennett disagreed.

"Funding is fundamental. Ultimately you need to have schools open for education," Bennett said.

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