

2/21/11

Dear Senators:

Thank you for considering the establishment of a Rainy Day Fund to help ensure uninterrupted services for Oregon citizens, particularly our youth and other vulnerable populations.

Since August of 1999, I have lived in Newport with my husband, Jeffrey Gavin, and our daughter, Domenica, who is currently a sophomore at Newport High School. Domenica has had the benefit of learning from many wonderful teachers during her 10 years in the Lincoln County Public School District. Unfortunately, those 10 years have also been fraught with uncertainty and instability for teachers and students.

Since we arrived in Lincoln County, four school buildings have been closed. Students are shifted each year, placing elementary, middle school, and high school students in the same buildings. One year, a Newport High School math class held so many students that the fire marshal cited the school. The classroom had exceeded the maximum number of students for fire safety. Instead of splitting the students into two classes, they removed a wall to enlarge the room. The school had no choice. We simply did not have the funds to provide another teacher for our kids.

One of the biggest losses for our community came with the early retirement of a beloved music teacher, Christine McKenney. For many years, Mrs. McKenney taught music to all students, grades 1 – 5, at Yaquina View Elementary School. Domenica was among the hundreds of students who learned to read and appreciate music, play the keyboard, and sing in the choir thanks to this gifted teacher. Every year, Mrs. McKenney was told that her music program would most likely be cut due to lack of funding. Every year, somehow the school would find a way to keep the music program intact. In the spring of 2010, Mrs. McKenney was once again told that the music program may have to be cut. The uncertainty made it impossible for her to plan her professional and personal life. The compounded stress finally took its toll and she opted for an early retirement. In the summer of 2010, she learned that the Newport elementary music program would survive thanks to federal stimulus dollars. But it was too late. She had already retired. She told me that if she had known with certainty that the program would survive, she would still be teaching. (By the way, Yaquina View Elementary was recently closed because of budget cuts.)

We have watched families leave the state, and in two cases leave the country, seeking better educational opportunities for their children. The instability of our foreign language program is a major sore spot for parents who understand the global nature of our economy. At one time, Newport High School offered students four different foreign language programs. Today, Spanish is the only language offered. Domenica did not start learning Spanish until her freshmen year in high school. By the time she entered 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the middle school language program had already been gone for several years due to lack of funding. This year, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in Newport's Prep Academy are once

again offered a Spanish course, every other day. However, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in Newport's Isaac Newton Magnet School are still not offered a foreign language because of a lack of funding. Administrators hope to someday be able to offer Spanish to all 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in both schools, every day. Do we dare to dream that big? By contrast, Ana Mena, an exchange student from Spain who lived with us this year, began learning English when she entered school at age three. She also studies German back at home.

Domenica attended the Isaac Newton Magnet School for 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. This school's charter places an emphasis on art and science. At the beginning of her 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, a group of parents was assembled to raise funds for art supplies. We were told that the funding source that traditionally purchased art supplies was no longer available. A school established to specifically focus on art and science was not consistently given the resources it needed to purchase paper and paints. We wrote a fundraising letter and parents responded favorably and so our children had their art supplies.

In the spring of each year, Newport High School students submit their choices for electives for the following year. Last year, Domenica requested journalism, creative writing, and choir. She plans to pursue a career in writing. At registration in the fall, we learned that creative writing would not be offered at all, although it had been the previous year. Choir would not be an option either. Only one choir class was offered and it conflicted with the only sophomore Advanced English class, which she was required to take, along with 40 other students. Yes, 40 students in one Advanced English class. How many writing assignments do you think one teacher could correct for 40 students? Our daughter's experience is the norm, not the exception. Because of unstable funding, many electives were either cut, or offered on a limited basis, and the required classes are unreasonably large.

Fortunately, Newport High School's journalism program is thriving because of a dedicated teacher, Mr. Matt Love, talented students, and sales revenue from newspaper ads sold to community businesses. (Copies of the most recent issue accompany this letter.)

Parents, teachers, and students are willing to partner with the State to provide opportunities for our children to thrive. We will purchase paper and paints. We will sell ads to keep a newspaper in print. We will host exchange students to give our rural kids a peek at a bigger world. However, we need you to stabilize funding so we consistently have enough teachers in the classrooms and a reasonable teacher/student ratio to give our kids the foundation they need to run this country. Our future is in their hands. Please help us make them strong enough to hold it.

Sincerely,

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