

**Chair Gelser and Members of the House Education Sub-Committee:**

My name is Margaret Perrow della Santina. I am submitting testimony today in support of HB2733. The K-12 equalization formula was intended to result in a final weighted average daily membership that ensures equity in school funding. Passage of HB2733 would ensure that the intent of the law is met with respect to small rural schools.

**HB2733 corrects an inequity**

This bill will correct an inequity that exists under the current law. As the law is currently written, a school can legally qualify for 'small rural' status, yet the Distance Correction Factor can nonetheless deprive a school of all or most of the 'small rural' funding to which it would otherwise be entitled.

Failure to fund small rural schools adequately often results in school closure and consolidation. Whether students travel 50 minutes or 90 minutes each way to get to school, those students are disconnected from their community—and their community from them—for the majority of their day. The impacts on their learning, and on their communities, are the same.

This bill would establish a minimum funding level (50%) for those schools qualifying for small rural funding. In considering funding formulae, it's important to remember that a school located 10 miles from the next nearest school might serve students who live 20 or more miles away, depending on district boundaries. Furthermore, mileage alone belies the fact that narrow, winding roads make travel treacherous and slow.

The distance between small rural schools (whether 8 miles or 20 miles) has very little to do with the excessive costs incurred by the small rural school, since the majority of transportation costs are reimbursed by the State. The excessive costs have more to do with fixed overhead spread over a smaller student population.

**Why thriving rural schools matter to Oregon students and communities**

At both state and district levels, Oregon has set its sights on raising graduation rates, boosting student achievement, strengthening early childhood and pre-K learning, and tightening the connections between youth and their communities. These are precisely the areas where small rural schools can excel if they are equitably funded. While small and often forgotten (approximately one in ten Oregon students attends a rural school), thriving rural schools are an important factor in moving Oregon toward its educational goals, and in ensuring equity in education for all children, no matter where they live.

Research has shown that students who attend school in their communities feel more connected to their communities. When local community members and organizations are a part of their learning experience, students take more responsibility for themselves and their surroundings. When they are known personally and have a strong sense of belonging, students have higher attendance rates, perform better academically, and participate in more extra-curricular activities. Research also shows that they develop a strong sense of citizenship in their community, and stewardship for their local environment.

But the benefits of small rural schools can be undermined if they are underfunded. When the underfunding of rural schools results in school consolidations, numerous inequities

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arise. For instance, students who attend consolidated schools face longer bus rides and are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities because of the challenge of transportation. Participation in extra-curricular activities, in turn, is linked to higher student achievement. Students who attend school outside their community have fewer opportunities to engage in real-world learning connected to the place where they live, another area where research has shown rural schools can be especially effective in boosting student engagement and achievement.

Rural schools provide an equitable opportunity for parents, and families to volunteer in schools and participate actively in their children's education. They also provide opportunities for community members and organizations to contribute expertise and resources to the school (and by extension the district). Locating schools outside of the community would prevent most parents, community members, and local organizations from participating directly in the life of their children's school.

These are just a few of the reasons that supporting thriving rural schools in Oregon means supporting equity in education.

Thriving rural schools also support the regional and state economy. When families know there is a local rural school for their children, they are more likely to move to rural areas. Tourism, agriculture, the real estate market, and a wide variety of businesses thrive when rural schools thrive. When there is doubt and uncertainty about the future of schooling in a rural area, the local economy contracts.

For further information and analysis, I urge you to consult the report "Why Rural Matters 2011-12,"<sup>1</sup> a report of the Rural School and Community Trust Policy Program. This report is intended to help policymakers make sense of the complex issues facing their rural constituents, in particular the importance of thriving rural schools to our students, communities, and economy.

### In Conclusion

- 1) The Distance Correction Factor as written, penalizes schools designated as small rural by eliminating all or most of the funding they are eligible for
- 2) HB2733 would correct this inequity by establishing a minimum level of small rural funding equal to 50% of what the school is otherwise entitled to
- 3) Rural schools are effective in boosting student achievement and increasing student engagement in our communities and vice versa
- 4) Adequately funding rural schools is critical to the regional and state economy
- 5) Passage of HB2733 requires no additional school funding and has a negligible impact on other districts

I urge you to support HB2733 as amended. Thank you for considering passage of this bill.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2820>