

From: [Brent Barry](#)
To: [HWREC Exhibits](#)
Subject: Wildfire Recovery testimony
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Good Evening Chair Clem and Members of the Special Committee on Wildfire Recovery,

My name is Brent Barry; I am the superintendent of Phoenix-Talent Schools, and I'm speaking to you tonight to provide an update on the impact of the Almeda Fire on the community that we serve, and the needs of our kids, our families and our community as a whole.

I want to start with the reality for our families: more than 480 families who care for over 700 students in our district lost their homes. Those families have scattered to find support wherever they can: locally, that means many are now living with one, two, or even three other families at a single residence. OR they may be in an RV or Trailer that was generously donated OR they may be still in hotels. For others, their only available support is found out of the area, meaning a complete uprooting of their family.

There is no question, having a place to call home remains the biggest need for recovery. And there's no easy solution for new housing, but by working together, we can get this done: As you may be aware, we had a housing crisis prior to the Almeda Fire, and the impact of losing 2500 housing units has compounded this challenge. As reported recently in local media, the scarce availability of housing has drastically increased the median home price in Talent and Phoenix. This makes finding affordable housing in the area in which our families once resided, next to impossible. Phoenix-Talent Schools continues to work with FEMA to find temporary housing solutions. Similar efforts are underway in the local governments of Talent and Phoenix. But Phoenix-Talent Schools and our partners in local city councils alone will not close the housing gap.

It was a huge relief to welcome students back to each of our campuses over the last two months. To see the familiar faces of their teachers and friends; to return to the hallways they remember from before the fires; and to create new memories in our brand new high school which opened a few weeks ago - all of this brings a sense of comfort that has been missing since life was turned upside down. Adding school staff to priority vaccination groups has given confidence to our educators to return to school. But with many students sharing housing with other families and multiple generations, we must further expand our vaccination groups to protect an already vulnerable population.

We must also remove barriers to access support programs. Many of our families were already living in the relative shadows of the Rogue Valley; with their homes and communities wiped off the map, they risk being further ostracized by no fault of their own. Please continue to support the grants and assistance available to organizations that are

helping our students meet their other basic needs, such as Rogue Valley Farm to School's "Farm to Families" food box program, and food pantries run by ACCESS.

I have tremendous admiration for the staff who serve in Phoenix-Talent Schools. The effort in serving our kids and families, that started hours after the devastating fire, was truly remarkable. This continues today, as you will see staff volunteering their time providing food boxes, delivering items to families in RVs/Trailers, and simply calling to see how they are doing.

But it truly takes a village, including our partners in the state legislature, to help a community that has lost so much. We are thankful for the efforts of this committee to provide the holistic, long-term support necessary to rebuild our community.

Thank you.

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Brent Barry

Superintendent, Phoenix-Talent Schools
401 W 4th St./P.O. Box 698
Phoenix, OR 97535
Ph.-541-535-1511
Fax-541-535-3928
brent.barry@phoenix.k12.or.us