



## Phoenix School of Roseburg

3131 NE Diamond Lake Blvd, Roseburg, OR 97470 / phone: 541-673-3036 / web: [www.roseburgphoenix.com](http://www.roseburgphoenix.com)

March 30, 2021

State of Oregon, Joint Committee on Ways & Means - Subcommittee on Education  
RE: Youth Development Division 2021-23 Budget

Greetings:

My name is Thomas McGregor and it is my pleasure to share today about the *Phoenix School of Roseburg* in Douglas County, as well as, my thoughts about the *Youth Development Division* budget for the next biennium. As the Executive Director of our private nonprofit, I also would like to take this opportunity to share about continuing support towards re-engagement priorities to be stewarded by local communities across the state.

To begin, a brief overview of the *Phoenix School* and the work we do. I believe as an agency, we are a seasoned 're-engagement champion' and I am excited to briefly share aspects of our story today. Founded in 1981 by former *Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission* Chief Operating Officer Vicki Nunenkamp, and her colleague Tommy Nehart, our school has been an engine for re-engagement work in our community for almost forty years. Serving 'at-risk youth' is our originally stated IRS special purpose. Today we serve a population marked unresolved trauma/ACE scores as their the most defined characteristic. Our work is done today through three areas of programming: first; *High School Success* with our grade eight through twelve charter school of over 200 students from eight surrounding communities and our private alternative programs for local residential treatment youth; second, our *Oregon Youth Corps* programs employing over 50 youth annually, and third; our *Brightworks Academy* after-school programming focused on career connected learning and leadership skills. Phoenix's currently adopted targets student learning approaches has us achieving personal growth with our students through our resilience-based processes grounded in the *Andrus Institute Sanctuary Model* certification, the only evidence-based change model for trauma informed practices, we are increasing academic outcomes through adopting new instructional methods through *PBL Works* and Project-based learning, and seeking to increase equity in our classroom practices through the *National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity's* micro messaging model. Our school has adopted the strategy of 'Rise-Up Resilience' for Student Success goals. We want students to be attending every day, we want our culture to be welcoming, and we want our students to see every moment in school as one where they're invited to 'Look, Listen, Do' to be a student leader in each moment. Our campus includes supports like on-site mental health services provided by the local child advocacy center, laundry services, food pantry but also those things that really keep students coming to school such as our acre-sized garden, trade careers prep program, robust art & music program, culinary, tech maker space and more. We are proud of our history, our students, our board, our staff, and our community's continued investment in our agency to be an institution focused on success for all children of the community.

Our school has been a direct recipient of YDD funding for this school year. The investment has directly added staff to making youth closer to their school learning community and increased availability of *High School Success*. Since January 2021, Phoenix has increased youth engagement to the school community through offering additional GED instructional avenues, a reading specialist, and an additional Bright Futures Leader who can directly provide mentorship to youth through home visits and instructional tutoring. Given the COVID-19 crisis, home visits by our Bright Futures Leader to learn directly from youth their situation and



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needs for supports has greatly influenced student attendance and productivity in classwork. *Phoenix Charter School's* plan focuses on supporting student mental and behavioral needs through social-emotional learning and instruction focused on individual resilience. It also addresses the need to increase students' sense of belonging and safety and the need for increased instructional time by the reduction of classroom disruptions. The goal has been to increase graduation rates for all students with an emphasis on our students of color, students with disabilities, students among the LGBTQIA communities, and students navigating poverty, homelessness, and foster care.

I feel it is my duty to make the bold recommendation to continue to prioritize YDD funding for Community Investments, Gang Violence Prevention, and Juvenile Crime Prevention as well as the Statewide Youth Reengagement System. Our agency has an established role in our rural community and must share the urgency of Douglas County. *The Forum for Youth Investment's* 'Opportunity Index' currently rates Douglas County as a 'C-' for youth when considering the local economy, education factors, health factors, and community capacity. 2018 data highlights 22.5% of youth (ages 16-24) not in school and not working. Counties with similar demographic in nation, according to the resource, pinpoints 15%, Oregon as 11.9%, and the nation as 11.7%. Our community's youth require investment for re-engagement activities, we must 'move the needle' on this data point. In 2021, our children need us now to break the cycle of poverty and create tangible programs towards opportunity for their needs here in timber country.

In concerns of the YDD and the *Student Success Act*, I wish to frame your energies as to one which would impact students of color, students with disabilities, students with emerging English language skills and students navigating poverty, homelessness, and foster care. Our agency strongly agrees engaging with these populations and ensuring their place in our programs with bridges to their needed levels of equity and a genuine inclusive place in classrooms is important. For our agency, English language learners are not in our population but students of color and students with disabilities are among our population and do require unique approaches. We especially believe students navigating poverty, homelessness, and foster care should be a unique priority and attention to these students extremely resonates with our work. The competing budget priorities for this subcommittee must daunting, but I urge you to see the YDD work as equity work that cannot be discounted at this time. The YDD priorities allow us to garner greater attention among our community leaders to the merits and needs for time investment towards equity work in a rural community.

I want to close by thanking you all for the amazing time, energy, and expertise you all provide our state's children. I wish you well on your work ahead and want you to know our agency is always available to partner for shared learning or the primary task of student success. Take care and stay healthy. My opportunity to share our story today ignites great hope for tomorrow in me. I know many in our ranks need constant sparks of hope as we continue to harbor the greatest asset in Oregon; our children. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Thomas McGregor  
Executive Director