

My name is Angela Turner and I'm teacher who works for The Hospital School Program at the Multnomah Education Service District. I currently teach inpatient hospitalized students who are experiencing acute mental health crisis as well as students who are experiencing chronic illness.

Cuts to funding and also the redistribution of funds impact many facets of education that you may not think of when you think of general education. Our Hospital teachers work with patient/students from all over the state giving us a first hand account of how underfunded and inequitable our education system truly is, and now, the pandemic has made it even more clear to everyone. We can not ignore it, we can not go backwards and we must not only keep our budget at 9.6 billion but strive to increase support to our students who have lost so much over the past year.

When I say "lost" I don't just mean academically but I also mean that students have lost their support systems. Many students are unable to access much needed support in academics, mental and emotional health and also the safety of school. They are unable to access these not just due to the pandemic but also due to the consistent lack of funding to promote student success in all areas of their lives.

Our Hospitalized students may make up a small part of the overall student population of the state but they are nonetheless just as important as any other student. They have the right to an education just as much as any other student, yet when the state budget is cut, ESDs feel a significant impact and it trickles down to smaller programs like mine. Our ESD program is currently and has been understaffed and underfunded for far too long. Over the past few years our staff has dramatically been reduced, due to budget cuts, yet our student population and their needs have increased, especially during the Pandemic. We are seeing more and more students with acute mental health needs who are not able to access school support because they are either non existent or stretched way too thin. These students are coming to our Emergency Departments and to our units.

Our students experiencing chronic illness or acute mental health crisis are already coming to us with large gaps in their learning due to medical absences and frequent hospital stays and my job as a hospital teacher is to not only help fill that gap to keep them on track for graduation but also communicate and transition them back to their neighborhood school where we hope they can find the support they need. This is already a difficult task but when our FTE and funding decrease year after year the task starts to become impossible. In addition to budgeting at the 9.6 billion dollar level I ask you to protect the way our budget is distributed to schools and ESDs by rejecting efforts to make big changes to the equalization formula.

Our students and educators deserve better. We have lived through quite a year with the demands put on us to teach during this crisis, and our students have had to make extreme shifts to learn online. The inequity is enormous and now that we are all painfully aware of it, we have to look forward. Decreasing this budget will only set us back.