

Jolianna Balmaseda

My name is Anna Balmaseda, I am a teacher with the Multnomah Education Service District's Hospital School Program at Doernbecher Children's Hospital. In my teaching, I work with students and families experiencing a diagnosis of childhood cancer, collaborating with educators and school partners in communities throughout Oregon to keep learners connected to their education and more importantly their identities as students.

In my role as hospital educator I have seen the impact of our mental health crisis in pediatric hospitalizations. This past year has been scary, our youth have experienced a once in a century pandemic many having been personally impacted. They have witnessed cities in our state and across our country explode with violence as we try to unpack significant social issues. Oregon's children also experienced an unprecedented fire season which resulted in many students being displaced in communities already stretched thin. As a hospital teacher, I have seen the impact of these traumas in an increase in hospitalization due to self injurious behaviors and attempted suicides. Even students hospitalized for routine surgeries or illness are endorsing difficulty with coping and concerning ideations during routine mental health screening at an increased rate.

In the hospital setting we learned long ago that school is a symbol of hope. Right now, Oregon's families need hope. Students need to know in their souls we believe their future is worth living. If we are lucky we have lived through a once in a lifetime pandemic while experiencing an up ending of many cultural norms and assumptions. It has not been easy and the path forward will be tumultuous. Oregon's youth need schools that are equipped to support their education and emotional health needs in the days ahead. I am here to remind you that **we have to maintain budgeting at the \$9.6 billion level or higher, the Legislature needs to protect the way our budget is distributed to schools and ESDs by rejecting efforts to make big changes to the equalization formula. Those changes amount to a budget cut by other means! The only change to distribution should be to right-size the poverty weight to a half weight – an important step for greater equity in student support.** Thank you