

Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

March 21, 2023

Co-Chairs Senator Frederick and Representative McLain and members of the Committee

I am writing on behalf of *Growing Gardens* in support of the Farm to School Grant Program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget. This Grant program provides critical funding for schools and early childhood education programs to purchase Oregon foods, hands-on farm and garden education programs, equipment and infrastructure for food producers and technical assistance for the farm to school community. Sustaining the current level of \$10.2 million dollars will support dependable business relationships between schools and food producers and maintain consistent educational programs that connect students to agriculture and nutrition.

As an educator, parent, and support organization, I support this grant program because I've seen firsthand the impact of garden-based education on students and the larger school community. I currently teach garden and food-based lessons to K-5 at Oliver Lent Elementary School in Portland, OR. At Lent, we are very fortunate to have a beautiful and thriving school garden where students and their families and other school community members get to connect with nature, breathe fresh air, get their hands in the dirt and feel where food comes from; where the process of learning and teaching is fluid, collaborative and relationship-oriented; and where the garden itself teaches us about how to build equitable and healthy communities. This way of learning not only does empower students to make informed choices on caring for their well-being but also fosters a sense of belonging and interdependence that they will carry with them as they advance in their education journey. At Growing Gardens, we care about the health of the communities we serve and the earth, and so I ask that you support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at the current level of \$10.2 million so this program can continue to support healthy kids, schools and communities. Thank you for your time.

*Cecilia Orozco
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Portland, OR*