

April 14, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Sen. Elizabeth Steiner
Rep. Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Sella Bemrose and I am a member of Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA). I have worked at Stayton Elementary School in Stayton Oregon for over 30 years as a Special Programs Assistant in the strategic reading program, and I make less than \$19.50 per hour. New hires are paid just above minimum wage.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of key investments to build a better Oregon with higher quality student-centered educational experiences for all students, workers and working families.

OSEA represents about 23,000 workers in nearly all levels of public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, ESDs, community colleges and special districts. OSEA members perform many of the essential tasks that keep Oregon public schools safe and functional for students, administrators and teachers. Classified employees are the most diverse sector of public education, so we most closely reflect our students. We have shared values and shared struggles. In a typical elementary school day, the ratio of classified public education staff to licensed staff is roughly seven to one – from the bus driver that picks them up, to the principal's secretary to the education assistants, the cafeteria workers, coaches, library and media specialists, interpreters, before- and after-school caregivers through the custodial and grounds staff who clean and reset the building for another day.

While we are very grateful to the Co-Chairs of Ways and Means for recommending a \$9.9 billion budget for K-12 in this economically challenging time, although the work the state directs us to do is assessed at \$10.3 billion. We need to do more for Oregon's students, because they need more from us to support their social, emotional, behavioral, physical and academic health – now more than ever before.

Every day, I am here to help my students. People accept and stay in classified jobs because we care about kids, and we not only want those individual students to be safe and successful, but for *Oregon* to be safe and successful. To make sure we're on a successful path together, we need a \$10.3 billion appropriation for the State School Fund (SSF) this session!

Oregon students' deserve a \$10.3 billion budget for the SSF. It is the essential, core funding for all our public-school districts. It funds the *essential* work of Oregon public education. It is the lifeblood that supports what classified employees are doing for Oregon students every day. We are the first to enter the building and the last to leave each night, to achieve our goal – Oregon's goal – to support all of Oregon's students.

Investing in public education must include investment in the educational workforce. We just don't have enough people to do what needs to be done for the students. Unfortunately, the people I work with are quitting left and right because they can't afford to stay. We need to increase the quality of classified jobs,

which also includes better salaries, and hours to keep our skilled workforce AND recruit more to help.

Education is a priority that requires consistent investments in addition to support for housing and behavioral health because these issues intersect and, if funded in concert, will mutually support Oregon's students and their families. Combined with the additional investments by this committee in our education workforce, these core budget elements will help ensure that we can really lift Oregon's students and families.

I know that this is a challenging time in Oregon's history. But I stand with you to do the very best for all of Oregon's students. Together, we support a lifetime of learning that will give all of Oregon a brighter future.

Thank you for your consideration and attention,

Sella Bemrose
Stayton, Oregon

Cc. Sen. Lew Frederick, Subcommittee on Education, Co-chair
Cc. Rep. Susan McLain, Subcommittee on Education, Co-chair