

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice-chairs Walters and Reschke, and Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

My name is Dr. Kirsten Carr. I am a family medicine physician in SW Portland, long-standing PTA board member, and parent of a 5th and 8th grader both in Portland Public Schools. My husband and I are both products of the Oregon public school system. I am now a practicing physician in Portland and beyond as a hospice physician and my husband works as a teaching assistant at our neighborhood school.

I'm writing to urge you to support HB 3221. This important legislation addresses some of the serious challenges facing our district. Over time the statutory limit has not kept pace with inflation, nor growth in property values. Between 2017 to 2022, PPS general fund expenditures grew by approximately 18%, yet the applicable limit only increased by 3% annually. Although future projections will be informed by several factors, early projections show that PPS general fund expenditures will grow by approximately 20% over the next five years. Our state is ranked consistently in the bottom 5-10 states by national review (1,2,3). The current state of our schools is certainly not something that we want to underfund if we would like to change this and help our children be successful.

By way of story, let me demonstrate what it would look like for my family if the state were to even just keep the current level of funding in our schools. Our 8th grader attends Robert Gray Middle School. In order to minimize layoffs, teachers were asked to teach only core content classes. This effectively eliminated 50% of the elective offerings. His school has a completely outdated HVAC/physical plant and is in dire need of updates. Our 5th grader attends Hayhurst Elementary and his building has been asked to take in two SES classrooms to remain "right sized". While this provides more staff for the school, it has resulted in our elementary school being in a constant state of shut down, as these children struggle to emotionally regulate in a loud and crowded environment. We have daily behavioral outbursts and emotional dysregulations that affect the entire school. Elopement, window shattering, staff injury, screaming, kicking, and property destruction are just a few of the many things that our kids are learning to deal with as part of a normal day. These sorts of disruptions to the day are also worsened as administrators have to cover for unfilled or underfunded positions and therefore do not enough time to supervise recess and lunch or offer support to the rest of the

classroom teachers. My husband, in his role as teaching assistant, is often left to oversee up to 150 children on the recess playground or lunch room as the other staff is occupied with behavioral issues or on mandatory break time. Our elementary school is only surviving right now with help from up to 70 parent volunteers a week.

As a member of the PTA and family member of several Oregon educators, I have more knowledge and insight than most parents into how the system is working and not working for our kids and teachers both. Most parents in Oregon public schools honestly just want their kids to go to a school that is free and easy and may not have time or money to worry about anything else. Only those parents with the most resources of time and money are able to really act on underfunding. This all too often results in removing their kids from the public school system into private schools as we saw in the height of the pandemic shut down. Portland Public Schools has avoided most of the layoffs that would normally happen this coming school year by using the last of the allocations of “ESSER” funds. Each school is proposed to receive just over \$100,000 for the 2023-2024 year only. This means that the full impact of the fund expiration will not happen until the middle of the next biennium of the state budget. At that point, it will be too late for the voices of concerned parents to be heard.

Public school education has been demonstrated to reduce poverty and reliance on welfare support, improve health (including mental health and reduced addiction), improve decision making skills, and improved political participation (4). If we want to make long-lasting impacts on the issues facing Oregon today, improving public education is the single most important expenditure of our time and money. I urge you to approve the house bill to reflect a true commitment to our children and our state. Please help us have the capacity to fully fund a lasting and sustainable success by using local funds for our local schools.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Carr, MD

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1. <https://www.alecreportcard.org/state/or/>
2. <https://www.oregonlive.com/education/2022/10/oregon-school-performance-craters-relative-to-national-averages-elementary-and-middle-school-math-scores-rank-6th-worst-in-us.html>
3. <https://wallethub.com/edu/e/states-with-the-best-schools/5335>
4. https://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/BestInvestment_Full_Report_6.27.11.pdf