

May 3, 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 Delores Piersol and I am a retired member of the Oregon Schools Employees Association (OSEA). My background is that I worked for the Hermiston School District for 26 ½ years. I worked for five years as a classroom assistant and 21 ½ years as an administrative assistant, which is a fancy name for running the in-school detention room. During my work as a professional classified employee, I coached tennis for 20 of those years and served on several committees within my school district. I have also served on OSEA's Government Relations Committee for over 20 years and, as a community partner, I have supported robust civic involvement in the public process. I hope you consider how small school districts like mine are hit hardest by budget impacts. We don't have the infrastructure and we don't have a very deep bench of people who can do the work of classified employees. Good classified employees are team players. We open and close the schools. We don't need the spotlight to do good work and we try to support the kids so they have good educational experiences.

Every day, I was there to help my students and I took a lot of pride in my work at the time. I am still very proud of my investment in our community's future.

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 to coaches, 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, 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. I have a grandson who is autistic and with the support he has received is now able to now go to school full days and is scoring high in several classes. This is an incredibly important investment in his life and our family.

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:

1. A \$10.3 billion appropriation for the State School Fund (SSF) this session, and
2. Meaningful investments in the education workforce - including:
 - Higher quality jobs that have Just Cause in the employment agreement,
 - Funding for recruitment and retention of classified employees to have five-hour minimum workdays or at least a 20% SPED differential,
 - Funding for the currently required de-escalation training and incident reports for classified staff who support special education students,
 - Funding for culturally appropriate early childhood literacy

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 education workforce. We just don't have enough people to do what needs to be done for the students. The people I worked with are quitting left and right because they can't afford to stay. We need to increase the quality of classified jobs 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,

Delores Piersol
Hermiston

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