

House Committee On Education
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

March 12, 2025

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the Committee:

As a school board member, and parent to three children attending Powell Butte Community Charter School in rural Powell Butte (OR), I urge you to support House Bill 3444. Oregon's public charter schools serve a critical role in Oregon's education system. Public charter schools are committed to educational innovation, providing personalized educational opportunities for our students, and emphasizing equity and autonomy to transform the lives of young people.

Unfortunately, Oregon law shortchanges public charter school students. By passing HB 3444, we can fix the outdated issues with Oregon's school funding model and provide fair funding for public charter school students.

Oregon's public charter schools can only access 80% of State School Grant funds and have no access to the number of other revenue streams that districts receive. This dynamic has created a huge disparity in funding. A recent report by ECONorthwest found that Oregon public charter schools receive less than half the funding of their district counterparts. Over the last ten years, charter school enrollment has gone up, but funding relative to enrollment has decreased. Without access to an equitable share of the SSF Grant and other streams of revenue that feed into the district-run schools, this gap will only continue to grow.

At my school, this funding gap is evident in our ongoing struggle to provide even the most basic classroom necessities. In our middle school classrooms, students are using furniture that is literally falling apart, while our elementary classrooms lack appropriately sized and well-maintained desks and chairs. The inequitable funding structure forces us to often rely on fundraising dollars from families and the community just to update essential curriculum materials—funds that should be 100% dedicated to enriching student experiences rather than covering fundamental educational needs. Our aging school infrastructure presents constant challenges, including an over 100-year-old furnace that frequently malfunctions, an outdated and deteriorating septic system that causes repeated basement flooding, roof and window leaks, and a blacktop surface that is unsafe for children during outdoor activities.

Our dedicated teachers are committed to delivering a high-quality education through our chartered place-based learning model, which connects Oregon’s rural children with the land and environment around them. Through scientific exploration, hands-on learning, and a focus on community stewardship, our educators foster meaningful experiences. However, they are expected to operate with an annual classroom budget of just \$250. This limited funding falls far short of what is needed to create an enriching and engaging learning environment. While our teachers strive to provide the best possible education, \$250 barely covers the cost of essential classroom supplies like markers, crayons, and books—let alone the hands-on materials that bring learning to life. Adequate funding, such as that proposed in House Bill 3444, could significantly enhance teacher morale, improve retention rates, and enrich the overall classroom environment. By providing the necessary resources, we can empower our educators to create dynamic, hands-on learning experiences that inspire and engage students, ultimately strengthening the impact of place-based education in Oregon’s rural communities.

Additionally, critical positions such as our school counselor and PE teacher are funded through external grants and fundraising efforts rather than stable, dedicated funding. Further, our budgetary struggle to adjust cost-of-living increases and salaries to remain competitive with nearby district schools negatively impacts our ability to recruit and retain dedicated, high-quality educators. Not only do our students deserve equitable funding in their school experiences - our teachers do, too. Despite these obstacles, our students commonly outperform many of our regional surrounding district schools, yet they are expected to achieve academic success in an environment plagued by financial inequity. This is not sustainable, nor is it just.

Passing HB 3444 will help fix this ongoing disparity by:

- Allowing charter school students to access 95% of the ADMw provided through the State School Fund.
- Putting the focus back on equity of opportunity for all of Oregon's children attending charter schools and not creating disparity of student support due to their choice to pursue a public charter education.
- Allowing charter school students to access local, state, and federal education dollars that are also currently available to non-charter public schools.

All students in Oregon's public education system should have access to fairly funded public education options that meet their needs. On behalf of our teachers, staff, and most importantly, students, please support House Bill 3444.

Respectfully Yours,

Brianna Rogers