

One of the key reasons I send my kids to public schools is because I deeply value the exposure and experience they have of collaborating and creatively problem-solving with diverse groups of people.

The issues the next generation is facing are enormous, and they're both intersecting and global. In order to deal with them and delay the worst impacts, these young people must be able to successfully work with other kids - their future colleagues - who speak different languages, who come from different socio-economic backgrounds, and who have different cultural backgrounds and identities. None of the big problems we face are going to be solved alone.

At the international and Waldorf schools where I've taught, I saw a lot of privilege and entitlement. They were wonderful schools but it felt very sheltered. When I was looking for schools for my now 8th and 6th graders, I made it a point to search for a diverse student body. I looked at how many children were receiving free school lunches and, among other criteria, I chose the school where there was a higher percentage of that demographic.

Some families may not make their choices this way, but I believe that if we isolate our students so that they're only interacting with kids who are just like them or whose families come from similar backgrounds, they won't be prepared to become leaders.

Public schools offer our society's best opportunity to provide these critical experiences throughout a child's development in order to produce global citizens.

At the state level, this means Oregon must track school accountability in terms of quality too - not just quantity. The first programs to be cut are often considered "extras." Music, art, languages. School garden programs are one example: this is where mental health meets environmental stewardship. When students get outside to collect muddy water and see how it's filtered through leaves and sand and gravel, it's not only a lesson on the watershed system but it also creates the conditions for more of that hands-on collaborative problem-solving that doesn't show up in traditional accountability data. And when we cut educational assistants and aids, it's impossible for a teacher to get 30 kids dressed and out the door, give instruction, and keep everyone on task, all within a shortened teaching period.

I urge you to fund our public schools to the Quality Education Model at the very least. Please also consider how the quality of the education we provide our future leaders can be better incorporated into measurements.

Sincerely,  
Theresa Tran  
Portland Public Schools parent  
Senate District 22, House District 43