

Dear Budget Board Members,

I am writing to urge you to prioritize and fully fund our schools in the upcoming budget. As a teacher who teaches math, math support, and AVID, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact of education on our students. I am deeply concerned about the recent funding cuts that threaten the quality of education, as well as the safety and well-being of our students and our community.

I've challenged my students to think critically and use their knowledge to advocate for change and make a positive impact. Whether by modeling their own business ideas in math, learning financial literacy, budgeting for gardening club, writing letters to policymakers about issues like the reintroduction of sea otters to the Oregon coast, collaborating with organizations like the Native American Rehabilitation Association (NARA) on their depave site, or participating in local community meetings regarding urban development issues, my students are learning how to engage with and make a difference in their communities. They are not just learning academic skills—they are learning how to become responsible, active members of society. But these opportunities are threatened by funding cuts.

I mentioned previously that I teach math support and intervention. This class is a tier 3 MTSS intervention class designed to help students whose MAP scores and classroom grades indicate that they need additional support. My math support students work twice as hard as any other class. They have chosen to give up an elective in order to practice foundational math skills and become more successful in their math classes. These students and their families understand the importance of literacy and put in 110% in order to improve their academic skills. AVID stands for "Advancement via Individual Determination" and my students are some of the most determined people I have met. Yet both AVID and math support programs are being cut. Next year, PPS has cut a significant portion of their math and reading support programs, including my position. The federal government would like you to believe that they are defunding education because schools teach "radical ideologies" but what they are actually cutting is math and reading.

In addition to the challenges we face in the classroom, I want to specifically highlight the critical need to fund HB3004, which provides youth services aimed at combatting youth violence. Last year, while I was teaching at Springwater Trail High School in Gresham, Oregon, one of my students, Alex, was tragically shot and killed by another youth. This devastating loss underscores the importance of preventive programs that give young people the support and resources they need to make better choices. Programs like those outlined in HB3004 can help prevent more youth like Alex from losing their lives to violence. We cannot afford to ignore the need for such programs that directly impact the safety and future of our young people.

Additionally, vocational rehabilitation programs funded by the Department of Education are now at risk. These programs have helped countless students and young adults, including many of my friends and former students, find jobs and become contributing members of society. In a world that refuses to provide adequate resources for disabled individuals (I also urge you to fully

fund Medicare) refusing to provide them with support to earn their own wages is a death sentence. Reducing or eliminating these programs means limiting the opportunity for many young people to build successful futures. These programs provide the skills and support needed to transition into the workforce, and cutting them would be a mistake that will have long-term consequences.

As the Department of Education faces increasing cuts, we are also at risk of losing essential programs like the McKinney-Vento program, which supports students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, students who are homeless are struggling to learn because their basic needs for safety and security are not being met. Why are we taking resources away from the most vulnerable students to line the pockets of billionaires? Special education programs need the funding to support students with disabilities who require tailored resources to thrive in an inclusive learning environment. We must ensure that these students, who face the most significant barriers to success, have the support they need to succeed in school and in life.

You may have seen me sitting and knitting in the back of the ways and means road show in Gresham, much like I do at every recital, performance, sports game, or any other extracurricular event that my students regularly invite me to. I care deeply about my students and I wholeheartedly believe that they are our future. I ask that you consider the long-term consequences of these cuts and fully fund the programs that support our students, our future workforce, and the well-being of our community. By ensuring full funding for schools and programs like HB3004, vocational rehabilitation, and the McKinney-Vento program, we are investing in a better future for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to seeing the positive changes that will result from your support of our schools and students.

Sincerely,
Veida Lekakh
Multnomah County Resident and Teacher