



Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Amanda Orozco, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Unite Oregon, a statewide organization dedicated to advancing racial and economic justice by empowering historically underrepresented communities. We strongly support Senate Bill 749, the School Participatory Budgeting Act, which would establish a participatory budgeting pilot program in Oregon's public schools.

Young people in Oregon have faced immense challenges in recent years, particularly during COVID-19, which led to significant declines in attendance and graduation rates. Oregon's public school system continues to rank among the lowest in the nation, with some reports placing it at 42nd. Too often, the priorities, needs, and hopes of students are overlooked in decision-making processes that directly affect their education and well-being.

Research consistently shows that student engagement outside the classroom, whether through sports, clubs, or leadership opportunities, correlates with better attendance and higher graduation rates. Additionally, civic engagement is linked to improved health and overall well-being. SB 749 provides a proactive approach to addressing these challenges by giving students a direct role in shaping their school communities through participatory budgeting.

This pilot program will allocate \$500,000 to public schools, allowing students to determine investments in their educational environment. By engaging in a democratic process of generating ideas, developing proposals, and voting on school-based projects, students will learn democracy by doing. Participatory budgeting has already been implemented successfully in schools and municipalities across the United States, funding initiatives such as outdoor seating and shade structures, recess equipment, music programs, and filtered water stations.

Beyond improving school environments, participatory budgeting fosters a sense of responsibility and belonging, strengthens youth-adult partnerships, and equips students with lifelong civic skills, including the practice of voting. Our schools work best when students are heard and administrators understand the needs of their diverse student bodies.

Unite Oregon urges you to support SB 749. Investing in student participation today will not only strengthen our schools but also prepare the next generation to be engaged and informed community members.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda Orozco, Policy Coordinator