

Thank you for hearing my testimony tonight. My name is Grace Groom. I am the mother of two Portland Public School students and have the honor of serving as a 2nd grade teacher at Markham Elementary in SW Portland.

I'm testifying tonight to ask that as the budget process for the next biennium moves forward you all hold in your minds and hearts the reality of our school communities. Students are hurting. Families are hurting. School staff are hurting. Our communities are hurting. We need leaders to show they have our backs by increasing funding for direct-service public school staff. This will support the necessary healing for us to move forward towards more equitable outcomes for students. Direct-service staff are the front line of support for students and families. Teachers and direct-service support staff are addressing learning gaps due to COVID closures, making sure families are connected to wrap-around services, and supporting social-emotional well being of our students every day.

As a classroom teacher, this year I started the year with 10 more students than I did in the previous year. 10 more students than pre-pandemic. A class size of 29 2nd graders, 11 of them from families who speak a language other than English as home, 3 of them identified as needing support from Title X due to unstable housing. During the needs of my students and their families have been so much greater than any previous year in my 20 years of teaching. To have MORE students to care for and keep safe during a pandemic made zero sense to me. These kinds of funding choices show at best a disconnect and at worst a disregard for the realities of the struggles and hardships our students are facing. Looking forward, these needs will not disappear with the pandemic. Post-pandemic our students and families will return to buildings in need of more social, physical, financial, emotional and yes academic support. The need is massively greater than pre-pandemic. I'm asking you to prioritize funding to increase direct-service staffing so we can meet that need.

Class size matters. As a classroom teacher, I can do much more outreach and support to families if I have 19 families to support, not 29. I can provide more targeted lessons to support student's individual needs if my caseload is more manageable. Teachers can do so much, and we have done so much despite the history of our state not yet meeting funding targets to provide the Quality Education Model. The pandemic has shown us we are all capable of so much, if we collaborate. That's why I'm here tonight to ask for your support to help us help our students and their families. Setting maximum class size targets and funding schools for the QEM will make a huge difference in the lives of our students. It will provide the salve to heal the wounds of this pandemic.

In addition to setting class size targets, our students need and deserve more attention from social workers, counselors, educational paraprofessionals, nutrition and custodial staff. The ship that is our publicly funded schools is taking on water, and in fact is underwater as it is overwhelmed by the rush of needs brought on by the pandemic. We need all hands on deck, working directly with students and families in schools, to right this ship. You are the ones who can make the difference for who sinks and who is saved.

Please align our state budget priorities to meet the needs we are facing. Aim to reduce class sizes at schools serving students who have been hardest hit by the pandemic. Hire more teachers and other direct-service staff in the next biennium to give our students and their communities what they need and deserve.

Respectfully submitted,

Grace Groom

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