

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. Please support public schools by budgeting \$9.6 billion as the minimum necessary to serve our students. Your support of no less than 9.6 billion for K-12 schools will do so much to help to heal the wounds of this pandemic.

Direct-service school 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. During the pandemic the needs of my students and their families have been so much greater than any previous year in my 20 years of teaching. Looking forward, these needs will not disappear with the pandemic. Post-pandemic our students and families will return to buildings in need of even more social, physical, financial, emotional and yes academic support. The needs will be massively greater than pre-pandemic.

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. No less than 9.6 billion will do that. And 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. Approving no less than 9.6 billion for K-12 education will give our students more teachers and other direct-service staff in the next biennium so we can give our students and their communities what they need and deserve.

Respectfully submitted,

Grace Groom

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