

Testimony from Helen Ying for SB 5555
4/21/21

Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward, and Rayfield; Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Helen Ying, and I sit on the Board of Directors for Multnomah Education Service District. MESD provides services such as school nurses and technology support to the eight school districts in Multnomah County, as well as operating several schools and programs that serve some of the most vulnerable students in our region.

As an ESD, we receive an allocation from the State School Fund on behalf of our component districts. Our districts can use these funds to purchase services from us, or they can have some or all of the funds passed-through to their general operating budget.

This means MESD's budget and programming are driven by what is requested of us. As a result, we are very sensitive to the changing needs of students and districts, as well as the uncertainty around the K-12 budget.

With a \$9.1 billion State School Fund, the districts in our region would be looking at cutting over a week's worth of school or cutting dozens of staff. This is at the same time that we are talking about the need for increased social-emotional supports and extended learning opportunities for students. This disconnect between need and resources makes it very difficult for us as an ESD Board to set our own budget.

At the currently proposed K-12 funding level, our districts would be faced with reducing the level of service they get from us, or forgoing nearly \$3.5 million that they would have otherwise taken as pass-through funds. The latter is yet another reduced resource for districts at a time when they are already facing cuts. The former represents a reduction in services such as school health or technology just as the past year has made them more important than ever.

Our districts could also choose to purchase fewer alternative school slots from us. But our overhead costs for those programs are only reduced if we cut full classrooms. If not, we are left finding a way to maintain those programs, likely by pulling funds from other service areas.

This is the sort of "dance" we are all doing right now, as we budget for the fall. At \$9.1 billion, our conversations are based on what is possible and affordable, rather than on what our students need. I ask you to recognize that our students need and deserve more from us this coming year, not less.