

Co-Chairs Steiner-Hayward, Johnson, Rayfield, and Members of the Joint Ways & Means Committee

My name is Sonja McKenzie, and I am the Chair of the Parkrose School District School Board. I ask you to please allocate 9.6 billion dollars to the State School Fund so we can avoid cuts to instructional time and staff.

We are a small, urban district that serves about 3,000 students. At a funding level of 9.1 billion, our district would have a \$2 million shortfall. In the grand scheme of the State School Fund that may not seem like much, but it is a lot in our district to absorb. It is the equivalent of 18 teaching positions and 14 school days. A loss of that magnitude would be a huge blow to our school community.

Parkrose is among the most diverse districts in Oregon. Our student population is majority BIPOC students and non-white students. I am so proud of our school community and our students. Especially because of the challenges they face. Every day approximately 80% of our students show up qualified for free- or reduced-price nutrition services based on federal poverty data. We run a school-based health center so our students have a path to medical care they might not otherwise have access to. During COVID we've increased student mental health supports and distance-learning life skills. Our district works hard to support the real needs of our students. And it really does take every one of us to make this school community work for our students.

That was why I was so excited by the passage of the Student Success Act in 2019. These historic, equity focused investments invigorated our community. We had a tremendous public engagement process, and I thought we had turned a corner on the decades of underfunding public education.

A 9.1-billion-dollar State School Fund is an allocation that is simply not sufficient to operate our districts as we do today. In fact, based on the 50-50 split in the draft budget, we'd have less money next year than we do this year. It would be an actual cut, not even considering the increased costs associated with COVID, bargained contracts, and inflation over time.

And it is concerning because I understand that we have received an unprecedented influx of money from the federal government, specifically to be spent on our schools in these unprecedented times. And our state has record reserves. Our students are experiencing historic learning loss and trauma from the COVID pandemic, especially our students of color. Our funding reserves were built for just these moments.

In a few months I, along with 4 of my school board colleagues, will be responsible for finalizing our district's budget for next year. I hope that it is a budget that I can be proud to support. We need funding to keep teachers and students in our diverse, challenging, wonderful community whole in these unusual times. We need funding that allows us to build on the good work of the Student Success Act. We need funding to deliver on the promises we have made to our community to meet the needs of every student.

Please help me to do that. I urge you to appropriate no less than \$9.6 billion to the state school fund.

Thank You