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Within our growing, diverse community, we sow the seeds of opportunities to raise prepared, resilient students.

January 21, 2023

To: Oregon State Legislature  
Senate Committee on Education  
Senator Michael Dembrow  
Senator Suzanne Weber  
Senator Dick Anderson  
Senator Lew Frederick  
Senator Sara Gelsler Blouin  
Senator Art Robinson  
Senator Rob Wagner

Dear Senator Dembrow et al.,

My name is Dr. Creighton Helms, Director of Student Services and Federal Programs for the Gervais School District 1, and I am submitting this letter as written testimony in favor of SB 531: Appropriation of moneys from General Fund to Department of Education for summer and after-school programs, which at the time this letter is written, is scheduled to have a public hearing on 1/24/2023 at 3:00pm.

I share with you on behalf of the Gervais School District and the Gervais community. Like many socioeconomically disadvantaged, high minority communities throughout the state, Gervais School District historically is not able to fund summer school and afterschool programs using general funds and must rely on grants to provide these opportunities. Furthermore, our community is too small to permanently host organizations (i.e., YMCA, Kids Unlimited) or facilities (i.e., the Kroc Center in Woodburn, Kids Community Learning Center in Portland) that offer these services independent of the school district. Given this, “after the school bell” each day, the majority of Gervais students, most notably our elementary-aged learners, simply go home. During the summer, they stay home. Exacerbating this inequitable problem is that in many cases, parents are working full-time jobs throughout the year, meaning our students go home, or stay home, to empty homes for hours on end, with no activities or opportunities to explore, grow, and achieve beyond the time they spend on their cellphones or tablets behind closed bedroom doors.

Objectively, I know we all see this as a problem. Our teachers experience this “summer loss” every Fall, and it truly impacts our student’s ability to experience academic growth and achievement. It goes much deeper and further than that, however. Without afterschool and summer school opportunities, our students experience regression with their social, emotional, and behavioral progression. They lack the experiences to develop critical thinking skills with their peers. They miss the chance to laugh, and play, and learn outside the classroom in activities that they would otherwise not experience at school. Having afterschool and summer school opportunities values their Whole Child education, and it cannot be accomplished without funding from the State.

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To that end, I am humbly asking the Oregon’s Senate Committee on Education to fund summer and after-school programs for schools throughout the state, especially Gervais SD and districts of our ilk. I can say that because to a non-sustainable grant we received this year, our elementary school was able to offer afterschool programs this year. Among them were programs like art, basketball, chess, Cool2BeKin, drama, leadership, Legos, OBOB, photography, sewing, soccer, Spanish, STE(A)M, violins, and more. We’ve even contracted with a community action group out of Woodburn, ENLACE, to offer computer classes, guitar and musical instrument classes, and other cultural events and community projects. **OVER 70% of our elementary students, which is nearly 300 students, have participated in at least one afterschool club.** This clearly tells us that when programs are offered, our students will participate. Regarding summer school, over the last two years through various grants, we have provided dynamic, STE(A)M-focused summer programs for Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students and credit recovery programs at our high school. We struggled to hire enough staff to meet the extremely high number of students wanting to participate. This is not anecdotal evidence. This is true, experiential feedback that if the funding is available, it will be used earnestly, wisely, and effectively to provide programs that students will truly enjoy. Below are just a few images of students enjoying recent afterschool or summer school programs at Gervais Elementary: introduction to guitar, gardening, coding and music, taekwondo, and a field trip to OMSI. Without your funding in the future, most of these students would be at home during the time these pictures would otherwise be taken, babysat by a tablet or cell phone, passing the time until their next school day began.





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Thank you to Senator Dembrow and all members of this committee for being champions of public education in our State. It is true that our students and families themselves often do not have a loud voice in these decisions, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak on their behalf. It is equally true that rural districts in socioeconomically disadvantaged, high minority communities such as Gervais SD 1 often do not have a loud voice in matters such as these, so I appreciate your vision in seeing that and representing us loudly and proudly. Our students equally deserve every opportunity to follow the same dreams and passions they share with other students throughout the state, and knowing you are a champion and dream-maker for them is powerful and encouraging. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Creighton Helms  
Director of Student Services and Federal Programs  
Gervais School District 1  
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*More images from afterschool or summer school in Gervais: STE(A)M club, violin club, art club, and Legos club.*

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