



# Phoenix-Talent Schools

Excellence For Everyone

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Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

3-16-23

Co-Chairs Senator Frederick and Representative McLain and members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of Talent Elementary School in support of the Farm to School Grant Program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget. This Grant program provides critical funding for schools and early childhood education programs to purchase Oregon foods, hands-on farm and garden education programs, equipment and infrastructure for food producers and technical assistance for the farm to school community. Sustaining the current level of \$10.2 million dollars will support dependable business relationships between schools and food producers and maintain consistent educational programs that connect students to agriculture and nutrition.

I have had the privilege of having Rogue Valley Farm to School work with my students for the last three years. I have watched as they have created meaningful and relevant curriculum, even during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual learning. My students consistently comment on how "Garden" is their favorite class and that they wish they had more time in the garden. We have made our own harvest meals on field trips, which my students regularly report as the "best meal" they've ever had. They have been exposed to lessons on social justice issues, such as food insecurity and labor rights for farmers, nutritional information, such as why whole-wheat has more nutritional value, and social emotional and awareness-building activities, such as creating food memories and wish trees. All of these experiences have enriched not only their classroom experience, where there is not always time to discuss such important issues, but I believe has also contributed to creating a broader world-view and boosting critical-thinking skills, empathy, and investment in students.

As an educator, I support this grant program because I have seen first-hand how it builds skills for wellness and health in kids and their communities as well as a strong local food system and supports our local economy. I ask that you support including this grant program in the Oregon Department of Education's budget at the current level of \$10.2 million so this program can continue to support healthy kids, schools, and communities. Thank you for your time.

*Jessica Ward*  
*Educator at Talent Elementary School*  
*Talent, OR*



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