

April 21, 2023

Mahalo nui loa Chairs Sanchez and Steiner and members of the committee for listening to all of the testimonies both written and spoken. My name is Tia Lehua McLean, and I am a kindergarten teacher in Southern Oregon. I have had the honor of being a teacher in our community for the past 16 years. In 2020 I was Southern Oregon's teacher of the year. Never in my time in education have I had the heart wrenching opportunity to lean into teaching with today's depth of love, support & courage.

Teaching through COVID and in the wake of the Alameda Fire I was inspired by the collective efforts of students and neighbors to band together to support one another. Our School District created a donation center and provided food, supplies, shelter, used cars and hope to hundreds. Despite local and federal efforts, we still have families who struggle with housing, food and employment insecurity. Our schools are a safe space where social services and educational services unite. Depleting our resources adversely impacts our ability to serve students and families through the trauma that is not done yet.

Last week I had a former student, now High School senior, take his own life. There is nothing more heartbreaking. The ripple of these times has and continues to leave students in the surging currents of societal shifts, government policies and funding shortfalls.

As a teacher, mom and sister to a brother who also took his own life, I always wonder what can we do as a community to continue to come together, just like we did after the fire, to support each other? Schools are support nets that rely on full educational funding.

In our district a cut budget looks like losing 1 administrator, two teachers, six educational assistants, and two school days. Maybe that's not much to you, but when I look at the relationships students have with staff, I know more adult connections means more protective factors for kids. I know more connections equals more hope. Schools are a place where students can go to be fed, loved and supported. They are a place where our youngest citizens can find their calling and their purpose. Schools are the place where we learn that the world is bigger than us, that we all have a gift to give and that we all have the opportunity to be changemakers.

The current framework of \$9.9 billion for K12 education is not enough - it would mean districts like mine would need to make cuts. Please adequately fund our school districts. We need the investment this biennium so our students and communities don't just survive, but thrive.

I took my kinder class to an Assisted Living Home last week to share songs, dances, cards and jokes. One of the residents cried while he held my hand and told my students "you make a difference everyday, just by being you."

Chairs Sanchez and Steiner and members of the committee, you too can make a difference today.