

A few years ago, the owners of a local baseball team took a risk. They heard a pitch from two teachers about a labor of love. It was a plan that had not yet been tested or fully formed; one that aimed to support students who had lost their way. We needed the support and funding from a source outside of our school budget, and we needed it to be given with a leap of faith. Would this baseball team support us - and would they be willing to go all in despite the chance our plan might not have the outcomes we hoped for? They said yes.

This “yes” became a true partnership between the Hillsboro Hops and a middle school class called Team Up. For a year, the Hops organization, its employees, its owners came alongside our kids in the classroom and outside of it - showing them love, support, career opportunities, and the importance of partnerships in helping us all reach our potential. Students who had never thrived in school were finally seeing a path for their future. The Hops funded breakfasts, math class supplies, field trips, and most importantly built personal, genuine relationships. They showed how a business can be the **key piece of a puzzle for a community and a state to thrive.**

Fast forward a few years, and I’ve been following the discussions and debate around providing a percentage of state public funding to support a massive private effort to allow the Hops to continue to grow their positive impact in not just Hillsboro, but the state itself. If you are not a baseball person (I am not) you most likely have been perplexed about how in this day and age a state might consider supporting this endeavor when we have such deep funding needs for critical areas like education, housing, mental health services, infrastructure, and more. But as a teacher, a mom, and a longtime Oregonian, I find myself hoping that despite the optics and politics that might be at play, our legislators and community members will reserve a space to consider that this is not really about investing in a sports arena. It is about investing in people.

I can list all of the reasons that this makes sense on paper. There are profit number predictions, tax benefits, and tourism incentives that have been mentioned. News stations have covered the “pros and the cons” but what is missing is the piece about the uniqueness of this particular organization. At their core, they care about making a positive difference. Through their love of baseball - which is a lifelong passion - they have been able to use the success of their business acumen and vision to give back to the community in ways that may not always make the front page news.

The Hops values mirror who we are as Oregonians. It is because of their genuine care for people that allows them to hire and retain employees who hold the same values. It is because of their understanding of the importance of education that they support our local schools in a myriad of ways. It is because they know not all of us love baseball, but we all value the chance to have positive, healthy, and fun experiences as a community that they continue to grow an organization that is looking for out-of-the-box ways to reach everyone. It is their dedication to inclusivity and creativity that they continue to find success in everything they have done. Their vision for what a baseball team can bring to a community has come to life in very real ways that have had an incredibly positive impact in Oregon.

Years ago, the Hops took a risk and invested in people for the simple reason of making the community a better place. In a time where we desperately need people - and businesses - who want to make a positive change, this is a group who has a proven record of success in all the ways that really matter. This investment by the state - a relatively small percentage compared to the private capital they have

raised - would show that we can all be partners in this journey to build a business that has done nothing but good since they've arrived. . I hope we can understand that this risk is more than worth taking....it is one we can be proud of being a part of.