



WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP

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To the Ways & Means Committee Members,

It is my distinct pleasure to offer hearty **support for the Trust for Public Land's \$1,000,000 request for the Madras and Alameda Rural Community Schoolyards Projects for funding through HB5201.** Willamette Partnership has been working alongside the Trust for Public Land since 2019 on the construction of four different schoolyard projects in rural communities around Oregon. Personally, I've been working on these projects from the very beginning—first in Chiloquin, and now in Ontario.

Our rural schools need help. Urban centers have tax bases and access to resources that small communities outside of the Willamette Valley can only dream of. Many of these buildings are in desperate need of updates, and their schoolyards sometimes have play equipment that is so old (more than 50 years), it requires National Historic Preservation Act review to disassemble. These schools also often serve our most vulnerable children. 85% of Alameda Elementary students and 76.6% of Madras Primary students are on free and reduced lunch programs. Both of these schools serve majority Hispanic communities.

I've seen firsthand the impact that these projects can have on a community. In Chiloquin, Willamette Partnership worked with the Trust for Public Land alongside a dozen local partners to pilot the first Rural Community Schoolyard nationwide. We seeded acres of native meadow, created outdoor learning spaces, planted trees to help shade the space in the summer, and updated play equipment for the kids. Our crowning achievement was a massive pole barn that covered a basketball court, which means kids can play all summer without risk of heat stroke, and can be active outside in winter when the snow is falling. We also worked alongside the Klamath Tribes to build an interpretive walking path that integrated the Klamath language and important cultural plants.

After two years of work in Madras and Ontario, our last hurdle to completing these projects is funding. My ask is that the Committee see this as the opportunity it is: to invest in our rural communities, to invest in our children's futures, and to put restorative justice into practice by supporting work on the ground in places where a history of divestment has led to inequitable outcomes for our youth. Please join us in supporting these critically important projects.

Sincerely,