

House Committee On Education  
Oregon State Senate  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the Committee:

As the Principal at the Portland Arthur Academy, I urge you to support House Bill 3444. Oregon's public charter schools serve a critical role in Oregon's education system. Many of the students we serve were unable to be effectively educated, for a variety of reasons, in district schools. Public charter schools are committed to educational innovation, providing personalized educational opportunities for our students, and emphasizing equity and autonomy to ultimately transform the lives of young people.

Unfortunately, Oregon law shortchanges public charter school students. By passing HB 3444, we can fix the outdated issues with Oregon's school funding model and provide fair funding for public charter school students.

Oregon's public charter schools can only access 80% of State School Grant funds, and have no access to the number of other revenue streams that districts receive. This dynamic has created a huge disparity in funding. A recent report by ECONorthwest<sup>1</sup> found that Oregon public charter schools receive less than half the funding of their district counterparts. Over the last ten years, charter school enrollment has gone up, but funding relative to enrollment has decreased. Without access to an equitable share of the SSF Grant and other streams of revenue that feed into the District-run schools, this gap will only continue to grow.

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<sup>1</sup> ECONorthwest. *Study of Oregon Charter School Funding 2024*. Oregon Coalition of Community Charter Schools, Oct. 2024. [https://www.orc3s.org/files/ugd/62bea0\\_05eae6c4155f4e29bf6063fabb2547be.pdf](https://www.orc3s.org/files/ugd/62bea0_05eae6c4155f4e29bf6063fabb2547be.pdf)

At my school, the disparity in funding is clearly reflected in our ability to offer competitive salaries to our staff compared to their counterparts in the district. This situation often leads to the unfortunate departure of dedicated educators. These individuals do not leave due to dissatisfaction with their work environment; rather, they are compelled to seek opportunities that provide greater financial stability for their families.

The implications of this trend are significant. When talented teachers leave, it directly affects our students and their academic success. Students miss out on the invaluable experience of learning from exceptional educators who are passionate about teaching and dedicated to fostering an enriching educational environment.

As we strive to provide our students with the highest quality of education, it is imperative that we address this funding gap. By ensuring that our staff receives equitable compensation, we can retain outstanding teachers and, in turn, enhance the educational experiences of our students. It is crucial that we invest in our educators, as they are the cornerstone of our students' success and the future of our community.

Public charter schools bear the responsibility for their own facility costs, while district-run facilities receive financial support through bonds. This fundamental difference highlights a significant disparity within our educational environments that is both evident and concerning. Currently, we are confronted with substantial limitations in our physical space.

One of the most pressing issues we face is the absence of a dedicated gymnasium. This lack of facilities restricts our students' opportunities for physical activity and development, which are crucial for their overall well-being. Physical education plays a vital role in fostering healthy habits and promoting social skills, and without a proper gymnasium, our students are deprived of these essential experiences.

The shared spaces utilized by multiple staff members present significant challenges in fostering effective collaboration and communication. The limited availability of adequate space for group activities hinders the ability to facilitate

productive discussions and teamwork. Additionally, the presence of several learning groups within a single environment further complicates the situation, as it can lead to distractions and a lack of focus. Therefore, it is essential to address these spatial limitations to enhance the overall collaborative experience for staff and improve the efficiency of communication among all involved parties.

The inadequacy of available meeting rooms further impedes our capacity to engage meaningfully with parents and families, a crucial aspect of fostering a supportive educational environment. Effective family engagement is essential for enhancing student success and building a community around our schools.

Perhaps most notably, our facility lacks an outdoor grass area for students to run and play. This absence of a safe, open space for physical activity not only limits their recreational opportunities but also negatively impacts their physical growth and development. Outdoor play is essential for children to develop motor skills, social interactions, and a sense of belonging; without it, we are failing to provide a holistic educational experience.

Unfortunately, current funding constraints significantly limit our ability to access larger, more suitable buildings that could accommodate these essential resources. This situation underscores the urgent need to address the disparities in our facilities.

It is imperative that we advocate for the necessary funding and resources to ensure our students have an environment conducive to learning, growth, and development. By addressing these facility disparities, we can create a more supportive and enriching educational experience for all students. Enhancing our facilities is not merely about improving physical spaces; it is about investing in the future of our students and empowering them to thrive academically, socially, and physically. Together, we must work towards creating an educational environment where every student can succeed.

Passing HB 3444 will help fix this ongoing disparity by:

- Allowing charter school students to access 95% of the ADMw provided through the State School Fund.
- Allowing charter school students to access local, state and federal education dollars that are also currently available to non charter public schools.
- Allowing charter schools to provide transportation services to students living within their sponsoring district and access transportation reimbursement grant dollars for providing those services.

All students in Oregon's public education system should have access to fairly funded public education options that meet their needs. On behalf of our teachers, staff, and most importantly students, please support HB 3444.

Thank you,

Tara Miller

Principal, Portland Arthur Academy

Charter School Proud for 18 years