

Submitter: Danna Brownell  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3149

I am a school board member, and parent of two students, at McKenzie River Community School. Our small district incurred tremendous losses in the 2020 Labor Day Fires.

The Holiday Farm Fire that raced through our river valley destroyed 517 dwellings including housing for teachers, staff and students of MRCS. Nearly a quarter of our district's students lost their homes.

As of November 30, 2024, more than 4 years since the fire, only 203 (less than 50%) of these residences have been rebuilt.

The story behind these statistics is that progress and restoration have been woefully slow, for various reasons. Displaced families have not been able to return. I just heard that the first family is moving in today to one of the 20 modular homes of the Homes For Good Housing Agency project at the former site of Lazy Days Mobile Home Park.

With this new affordable housing, along with other rebuilding currently underway, we can expect enrollment to keep on increasing as more families are able to return to our area.

Because of HB 4026, we have been able to continue offering students and families the stability and educational opportunities that make our district special. MRCS enrollment peaked during the 2019-2020 school year on the heels of an energizing transition to a charter school model with a focus on place-based learning and the environmental opportunities unique to our beautiful rural setting. This propulsion was completely derailed by first the pandemic and then the fire a few months later. I can happily report that MRCS has mostly hit its stride again; we are roughly two-thirds of the way back to the pre-fire enrollment numbers. From the 2024 Technology Educator of the Year and his impressive robotics program, to high school science students working with ODFW doing the salmon watch program, to CTE programs in which students are building sheds and transitional shelters, MRCS is on track to thrive in the coming years. We do not want this energy to be derailed again.

Of course we wish the restoration of our community would be farther along by now, but we need more time. Please vote yes on HB 3149, the buffer our district budget needs to maintain our positive momentum while our homes are rebuilt. Even extending the funding at the pre-fire enrollment level for one more year would help us avoid the program and staffing cuts we would undoubtedly have to make with decreased revenue.

I appreciate your consideration.

Danna Brownell