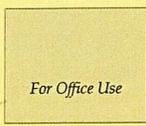


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Date: 3/5/20



Gresham-Barlow School District
Citizens Comments to the Board

Name: Kathryn Unger Phone: 503-661-6330

District Resident: Yes No

How would you like to provide your comments to the board? – please select one option below
 Submit written comment only Speak in person at meeting Speak virtually at meeting

Group / Organization: Hall Elementary

Topic: Special Education

- Public comments can be submitted in writing before the meeting, or given in-person during the meeting.
 - For written public comment, please complete this form and email your comments to the board secretary, Sarah Avery, at avery4@gresham.k12.or.us by 4:00 p.m. the day of the meeting.
 - For in-person public comment, complete and submit this form to the board secretary prior to 7:00 p.m. in order to speak at this meeting. The chair will call people in the order forms are submitted.
- The Board Chair may require that a proposal, inquiry or request be submitted in writing, and reserves the right to refer the matter to the administration for action or study.
- Speakers and/or written comments may offer criticism of school operations and programs; however, the board will not review personal complaints concerning school personnel or against any person connected with the school system. If there is a legitimate complaint involving individuals, the chair will direct them to the appropriate means for board consideration and disposition.
- Your input is valuable to the Board; however, the chair may limit the time for your comments (3 minutes per guest/15 minutes total). If you wish to provide a written statement, space has been provided on the back of this form.
- Please make sure to include your name for the record, whether you are a resident of the district, and the name of the group or organization you are representing, if applicable.
- Only one spokesperson should be designated to represent a group with a common purpose.
- Questions asked by the public will be referred to the superintendent and/or the appropriate staff member for response at a later time.
- The board’s regular business meetings are digitally recorded. They are no longer televised on cable access, but can be live streamed for virtual attendance through Zoom, on the district website, or on the district’s YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/@gresham-barlowschooldistri5482>

This is an opportunity for the board to listen and learn from the community. Board members are not able to respond to public comments during the meeting, but appreciate hearing your input. The board sincerely appreciates your interest in the Gresham-Barlow School District and thanks you for attending this meeting.

Space for a written statement is provided on the back of this form. Additional pages can be attached as needed.

Good evening members of the board,

My name is Kathryn Unger, I teach 4th grade at Hall Elementary, and also serve as the Safety and Discipline Chair for GBEA. I appreciate the opportunity to speak tonight.

Over the past several months, we have heard repeatedly about the district's bleak financial outlook and the inevitability of significant budget cuts. I understand that difficult decisions may lie ahead. But as you consider those decisions, I ask that you remember the many roles teachers fill—roles that extend far beyond what is written in a job description.

Teachers are instructors, yes. But they are also counselors, mediators, crisis responders, family liaisons, curriculum developers, data analysts, and community builders. Much of that work happens quietly, outside of contract hours, because teachers care deeply about their students and their families.

This is especially true for Special Education teachers.

Special Education teachers navigate complex legal requirements, write and implement individualized education programs, coordinate with multiple service providers, communicate constantly with families, collect and analyze data, and ensure compliance with federal and state law. At the same time, they are teaching, managing classrooms, and supporting students with significant academic, behavioral, and medical needs. Many also face the very real possibility of physical injury while doing their jobs, along with emotional strain and mental exhaustion that comes from trying to meet overwhelming demands with limited resources. Special Education teachers are dedicated and tireless advocates for their students, promoting what is best for the child rather than accepting what a district can easily provide. This advocacy is often misinterpreted as disrespect or insubordination, and teachers whose only agenda is securing a free and truly appropriate public education for their students are dismissed as unprofessional.

And so, likely because of these realities, Special Education programs have a high rate of burnout and turnover, remaining understaffed and stretched beyond what is sustainable.

It is difficult for educators to reconcile this reality with the top-down structure that exists in public education. In many districts—including ours—the people who work closest to students often earn the least, while those furthest removed from classrooms earn the most. Administrators and central office staff frequently make two or three times the salary of a new teacher, even though the daily, direct work with students—the work that defines the mission of public education—happens in classrooms.

If budget cuts across all departments are truly unavoidable, then the public deserves transparency about how those cuts are distributed. What reductions are being made within district administration? What sacrifices are being shared at the highest levels of leadership? Because from the perspective of those working in schools, it often feels as though the burden of austerity falls most heavily on the people already carrying the greatest load.

Tonight, I urge you to reject any budget proposal that makes cuts to Special Education staffing. Our students with disabilities have a legal right to services, but more importantly, they deserve educators who are supported, adequately staffed, and able to do their jobs well.

If we truly value equity, inclusion, and student success, then we must protect the people doing the work that makes those values real.

Thank you for your time.