



March 20, 2014

State School Fund Task Force
c/o Jan McComb, Legislative Coordinator
Oregon Dept of Education



Dear State School Fund Task Force,



Thank you for the opportunity to speak for those who have no voice in determining their educational future. Klahre House, a program of The Next Door, Inc., is a Private Alternative School certified by the Oregon Department of Education and operating under contract with the Hood River County School District since the mid 1990s. We provide Long Term Care and Treatment (LTCT) Education to high risk youth, ages 13 – 18, who come from a wide range of cultural and economic backgrounds; all of whom qualify for Oregon Health Plan and the Free and Reduced Meals program.



The youth we serve are not youth who have been able to make decisions for themselves since they have experienced homelessness and the effects of drug affected families where domestic violence and abuse are often times the norm. Some of the youth have lived on the streets and may have become victims of human trafficking. Some of the youth are even classified as being delinquent having fended for themselves with no adult supervision.

While about half of the youth represent minorities more than 90% come from homes below the poverty level. When these youth are placed by the state in foster care with us they must learn to live in a structured, organized and clean environment. Just having a place to sleep, being able to eat three meals a day and take a shower and wear clean clothes may be something they have not experienced in years. These are the youth who have not attended school or if they have, they have moved three or more times in a year therefore will not have received class credits. These youth have tremendous deficits in their education and may not have the basic skills necessary to read or work through simple math problems.



While programs like the Klahre House may only serve 1% of the youth in Oregon, over the past six years we have experienced a 17% reduction in our funding while educational spending in Oregon has increased 14%. Much of this decrease in funding occurred when the Oregon Department of Education held back funds that were supposed to be distributed to LTCT programs. Frankly, we are struggling to provide an appropriate education for the most marginalized youth, many of whom have great potential. It can be seen day after day as one young person who cannot read beyond the 2nd grade level stands before a class after a few months and reads with pride. Or the youth who, after not attending school consistently for a couple of years, is able to pass the GED test with extremely high scores.



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Our outcomes demonstrate how effective the Klahre House is even as our funds have dwindled. This happens because of very talented, special, committed and dedicated teachers' giving of themselves so the youth may have a greater opportunity to succeed in life. Nearly 90% of the youth placed at Klahre House score higher on standardized tests within a three month period than they did upon arrival. This is a clear demonstration that what we are doing works in assisting youth to acquire the educational skills and competencies needed to succeed. We have had 100% of youth who take the GED pass with scores well above those required. Unfortunately, Klahre House will not be able to be sustained under its current funding.

Some may say the current LTCT formula is fair, however they have not taken the time to consider that these youth have significant mental health and behavioral issues, are lagging in their educational skills, have social deficits and a lack of family support. Our teachers often times become the significant relationship in these kids' lives that result in them meeting the challenge to overcome their deep scars of trauma. These are the youth that would be a regular classroom teacher's worst nightmare if placed in public school. For us, they represent the challenge of creating a hopeful future for youth who have no vision beyond prison or a life of failure. While this may sound melodramatic, it is true that without our LTCT programs, these children will be lost and may have a tremendously negative impact on the lives of others and present an extreme cost for society.

At the present level of funding we will not be able to continue to educate these youth at our school since we have operated in the red for the past four years. In order for LTCT programs to provide an education for these youth, they need:

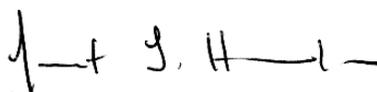
- Funding at an appropriate level based on a formula that reflects actual cost;
- Base funding on an annual census reflective of the year around enrollment rather than a one- time annual snapshot; and
- Move the funding for children in the LTCT programs into the State School Funding formula to ensure fair and equitable funding for these programs.

Thank you for taking the time to read our comments and for considering our request. Please do not hesitate to call us should you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,



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