

This year has been a year of unbelievable hardships globally, nationally, and locally. It's inspiring to observe the perseverance of our citizens committed to keeping safe and doing their best to support this community and its families. A star example of this is within our local schools. To look inside, one would be awed by what they saw: following the state's safety protocols, students of all ages wearing face masks everyday with few complaints, learning within their classroom "pods", working at desks spaced apart yet unable to face each other for discussion or collaboration. Despite these hardships, what we're seeing is that our students are on-board and happy to be able to come to school each day. Educators across all schools have worked extra hard to adapt lessons, create strong culture and community within their classrooms and throughout schools to make this successful despite the challenges. What's been created and maintained to ensure that students are well cared for, academically challenged, and growing socially, emotionally, and cognitively, should make everyone in our district proud.

Our students, many being highly vulnerable, are at risk of not receiving the support, services, and education they need. In recent years, we have collaborated with local mental health agencies to bring mental health clinicians to the schools. We have strengthened our social-emotional learning curriculum and have worked towards creating a positive school culture that is welcoming and safe for all students. This work is clearly visible when you enter our school. Even amidst the current pandemic, students are engaged and are learning. The school staff is skillfully teaching academics and meeting children's social-emotional needs.

The proposed cuts would have a dire impact on our children and community. The truth is... this is not sustainable. As noble a profession teaching is and as adaptable and accepting our students and families are, there's a breaking point of what can be done by dedication and commitment alone. Without a proper spending budget, we are being asked to accomplish more and more, with less and less. Students would be socially isolated, which has the potential for long-term impacts on their development and mental health. Families would experience the stress of balancing work and childcare. Student learning would be

impacted by less face-to-face teaching time, as well as new disruptions such as internet outages or limited access to materials.

Students who have relied on school as a safe place to connect with others and receive the support they need to flourish would no longer have access to that support. Additionally, losing “specials” and mental health supports would only increase the negative impact that remote learning would have on our students. These staff members are constantly working behind the scenes to promote wellness and offer creative learning opportunities for our students, including whole school events such as the Turkey Trot and Kindness Basketball, offering music lessons, supporting student voice, checking-in with families and students, and much more.

Mr. Prest shared a recent example: *“In PE class yesterday, a student took the risk of being a leader (not typical of this student) to help the class solve a challenge that was assigned to them. At the end of class the student said “I am so proud of myself!” This kind of life-changing breakthrough would not be possible if students were not in school.”*

Any cut of the budget would severely limit access to services such as transportation which severely impacts our children and families. There would be no cultural enrichment through field trips, for example. During the Spring lockdown teams of professionals throughout OUUSD created an amazing example of remote learning, but this was a reaction to a global crisis, not the answer to a problem. We observed how student engagement, opportunities for social learning and academic growth were negatively impacted, and that this format contributed more stress to already struggling students and families. As educators we know our learners benefit from receiving their education in person, from personal interactions with caring professionals as well as their peers. Technology, we know all too well does not always work, does not always reach a home, nor is it always affordable, and because of this, creates an immediate divide within the communities that we all serve.

We're not close to being out of the woods yet with this pandemic, but this community ought to be very proud of how our schools have conducted the

business of teaching and caring for all students, and understand the incredible output of energy it takes to make sure each child is thriving and each family supported. This has all come at a cost, and operating our schools in this manner cannot be sustained indefinitely. Educators from all of our schools come together on an ongoing basis to work on curriculum, assessment, study student data and much more. We've created a feeling of collegiality and community. We are a strong and getting stronger unified force all working toward the same goal of creating the best learning opportunities for students.

We can agree, students are *the* most important stakeholders in this equation. We know you value our community's children as we do, and, as we do, carry enormous hope for the generations to come. Together, let's allow this shared commitment to our kids bring awareness and urgency to our present crisis situation. The time is now and the need is critical. We cannot continue doing our best throughout the dark days yet to come without sufficient financial support and the community's belief in our shared endeavor.

We are seeing and feeling the joy of children each day in our classrooms.

*As one teacher shared, "I greeted a first grade student this morning and asked him how he was doing. He responded, "I am happy because I am at school! I love school." Examples like these are not rare; we are recharged by them daily.*

Let's invest in our students, our future. We are a team. Thank you for your full support.

Sincerely,

The Staff of Newbury Elementary School  
December 3, 2020