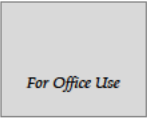


Date: 6.4.26



Gresham-Barlow School District
Citizens Comments to the Board

Name: _____ Phone: _____

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: School Social Worker - Rey Academy

Topic: Budget Proposal Public Comment

- 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.

Gresham-Barlow School District
Citizens Comments to the Board

Please check the box below and include a phone number if you would like to have someone contact you regarding the topic described above.

I would like to have someone contact me regarding my questions/ concerns at:

_____ Cell Home Work
Phone Number

The best time to reach me: _____

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight.

My name is Ali Appleton, and I am a licensed school social worker at Rey Academy/FLEX, one of the district's alternative education programs. Every day, I work with students who are often disconnected from traditional systems and are working hard to try to stay engaged in school, access support, and find a sense of belonging.

I understand the financial realities districts across Oregon are facing and the difficult decisions required to balance a budget. At the same time, I believe we have a responsibility to examine the human impact of those decisions and keep students at the center of this conversation.

This leads me to enrollment. If enrollment is declining, what is the district specifically doing to understand why? Students are communicating something to us through disengagement, attendance challenges, and rising mental health concerns. Have we truly listened to students, families, and staff about what they need from our schools? Are we addressing the causes of disconnection through that data, or simply responding to the outcomes?

Many of our students and families are operating in survival mode, facing housing and food insecurity, financial stress, and other barriers to school engagement. When families are focused on meeting basic needs, school engagement becomes more difficult—not because education is unimportant, but because survival must come first. Students are not disengaged because they do not value education. They are often overwhelmed and struggling to feel connected. For students who have experienced trauma, instability, discrimination, or exclusion, trusted relationships and meaningful representation are often what keep them connected to school.

When students feel seen, valued, and supported by trusted adults, they can engage academically. When those relationships disappear, so can that connection. Students stay where they feel connected, and families stay where they feel welcomed.

This is also an equity issue. Equity is reflected in what we protect when budgets become difficult, whose voices are included in decision-making, and whether students and families can access the support they need. Many families face barriers to services while navigating the realities of daily survival. They need not only resources, but connection, skill-building, and mental health support that help them engage with school and support their children.

If we are serious about improving enrollment and advancing equity, we must recognize that belonging, representation, trusted relationships, and access to support are not

secondary to those goals—they are essential to achieving them. To truly address disengagement, we must understand and confront its causes, not just respond to its consequences.

That is why I believe this is a pivotal moment to think differently about how we support students and families and to embrace more creative, collective, and community-centered approaches. The enrollment challenges we face today were not created overnight and will not be solved by relying on systems that were never designed for the realities students and families face. Programs and staffing focused on counseling, engagement, alternative pathways, and relationship-building are not extras, they are often the reason students remain enrolled, graduate, and begin to envision a better future.

As these decisions move forward, I urge the board to consider not only what is financially sustainable, but what is necessary to sustain the students and families who rely on these supports, and to carefully consider what may be lost when they are reduced. This moment calls for curiosity, creativity, and a commitment to listening to those closest to these experiences. Students may not remember budget numbers or strategic plans. But they will remember whether the adults in this system made them feel seen, valued, supported, and represented AND whether they were given a real place to belong.

Thank you.

Ali Appleton, MSW, CSWA, LMSW

QMHP-Qualified

Licensed School Social Worker

Rey Academy Middle School