

Hi, my name is Morgan Joyner. I'm a student at Portland State, and I'm also a graduate of Portland Public Schools. Both of my parents are educators, so I've been hearing and thinking about education my whole life, and it's something that I am very passionate about. My current involvement with a group called the Healthy Kids Learn Better Coalition has led me to view educational success from a public health standpoint, which is what I'd like to talk about today.

In preparing for this testimonial, I talked to my mom about the number of students we've known over the years whose educational success was compromised by factors outside of the classroom. I'd like to tell you a brief story about a boy named Nuradiin who goes to Hosford Middle School where my mom is the principal. Nuradiin is an African immigrant whose family relies on school for access to health resources, daily meals, and a safe place for him to be. None of his adult family members speak English, which creates a barrier to their engagement in Nuradiin's education. He is underweight, and although he has access to free breakfast and lunch at school, he consistently refuses to eat the food because there are no culturally appropriate options. Nuradiin is required to take ESL and a special education math class as his *so-called* electives, meaning that he will be barred from taking PE while he is in middle school.

Nuradiin's story involves a number of compounding factors that disproportionately affect his chances at educational success, and his experiences aren't out of the ordinary for low-income students and families who depend on school health resources, yet struggle to navigate the system.

Interconnectedness of resources plays a major role in students' ability to achieve when they don't have access to strong support systems outside of the school setting. It's not enough to focus on college preparation and test scores if we're going to truly improve educational outcomes for Oregon students. A coordinated system of school wellness has to be in place which reinforces students' efforts and removes physical, social, and emotional barriers to learning.

You all have been talking about efforts to close the achievement gap—but I'd like to point out that the gap doesn't start with achievement, it starts with opportunity. I urge you to make sure that the education system is doing all it can to create opportunities for children to be healthy, because if we do that, it becomes a lot easier to solve issues like chronic absenteeism, low graduation rates, and the achievement gap.

Thank you.