

Dear Multnomah County Commissioners,

This fall, a global pandemic is forcing school buildings across the country to close. Educators will be doing everything we can to support our students' wellness, their connections to one another, and their academic learning through a virtual environment, but we know that many of our students and their families have needs far greater than we can meet on our own. Of course, we ALL share the responsibility for supporting and nurturing the children of our community—the school Districts, Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and all of us as individuals. As a community, it is more important than ever that we face the crush of this pandemic with an even greater force of care and resources.

One of the crucial supports that children and families count on is the Multnomah County Library. I was alarmed to learn that, in this time of unprecedented need, Multnomah County plans to reduce supports for our community, and lay-off library workers this fall. In this time of uncertainty and struggle, it is essential that these services stay intact. **Rather than laying off library staff, please commit to working with them to creatively re-imagine how to meet the library's mission during this challenging time.**

Library services are crucial to our students during this pandemic, and there are so many opportunities for the county to partner with school districts and community organizations to support children, families, and community members. Library workers-- who in many cases already know our PPS students and families-- are uniquely equipped to help them navigate technology, on-line resources, and digital platforms; to provide access to culturally relevant and engaging reading materials and media; to offer 1-on-1 academic help for students; to support families reading together, including older children who many be care-givers for younger sibling during the closure of school-buildings; and so much more. I know library workers have an abundance of creative ideas about how to continue and expand these supports in this moment when they are so uniquely needed.

Furthermore, our library workers are themselves a crucial part of our community. This pandemic has exacted a massive humanitarian and economic crisis, and layoffs will only exacerbate the negative economic impact on our community and endanger working families. Knowing that there is NOT a shortage of funds, it is all the more egregious to suggest laying off the county's workers, and adding to the growing masses of unemployed Oregonians.

This is not the time to diminish our capacity to support children in our community. I urge you to reverse the decision to lay-off library workers, and instead to listen to them, and work with them to re-envision how our library system can support and serve those most in need.

Sincerely,
Elizbeth Thiel
President, Portland Association of Teachers