

Tina Meier-Nowell
Coordinator
NWRES
5825 NE Ray Cir.
Hillsboro, OR 97124



3/29/2021

Re: Senate Bill 5513

Dear Senator Dembrow and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am the coordinator of the School Psychology and Autism Consultant Teams at NWRES. I oversee staff in Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, and Washington Counties who serve students with low incidence disabilities including autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury, and orthopedic, visual and hearing impairments. I am reaching out to ask for your support of SB 5513.

I urge you to support this bill in order to move toward proper funding and service levels for students with low-incidence disabilities closer to what would be suitable to support students' learning and developmental progress. As noted in the graph on the document I have included with my letter, funding for Regional Programs has remained generally the same since 2009! Sadly, the population served by this program has grown by 20%, resulting in the diminishment of our capabilities. While our service providers are excellent and they are committed to providing top notch service to their students, there is no way that quality services can be provided and maintained long-term at this funding level without a reexamination of the funding structure and the most efficient methods to provide this high level of expertise to this unique student population statewide.

Notably, in the rural areas of Oregon, services from Regional Programs that are offered in the public schools are the *only* way these students are able to access supports, equipment, and services tailored to their unique needs from specialized staff. Access to private speech, occupational, physical, or ABA therapies that are commonplace in the metro areas are non-existent or hours' drive away from rural areas. Regional Programs are the only mechanism to ensure equity of service across our entire state for students whose specific needs require specialized materials and services.

This proposal is a step in the right direction to turn the tide for these students so that they may be able to have the specialized supports and services they need in order to experience the maximum level of meaningful inclusion in the general education setting, meet their educational goals, and to be prepared for life outside of school in higher education and the workforce. Please offer your support for the passage of SB 5513.

Thank you for consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tina Meier-Nowell". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Tina Meier-Nowell, M.A.
Coordinator of NWRESD's ASD and School Psychology Teams

Enclosures (1): Regional Inclusive Services

Regional Inclusive Services

Providing essential education and related services for children with specialized, high needs disabilities to allow inclusion to their neighborhood schools and communities across Oregon.

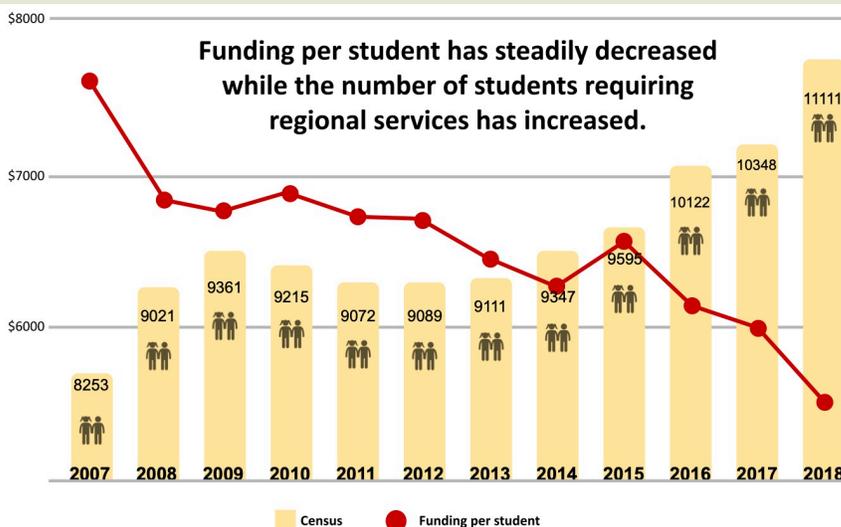
Legislative Request

- Additional funding of \$10 million from the general fund for the 2021-2023 biennium to begin to restore service levels reduced since 2009.
- Passage of Senate Bill 53 to examine Regional Inclusive Services and long-term adequate funding.
- To achieve adequate service levels, we estimate a need of an additional \$50 million in general fund dollars.



2021-2023 Priorities

- Recruit and retain teachers of the visually impaired, teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing and deafblind consultants.
- Restore autism services to 2009 levels (decreasing caseloads, increasing direct service and evaluation services).
- Increase capacity to support and engage families.
- Increase student technology access.



Funding History

2009-11 Total Funds:	\$62 million
2015-17 Total Funds:	\$58 million
2017-19 Total Funds:	\$62 million
2019-21 Total Funds:	\$62 million
2021-23 Total Funds:	\$61 million

** Adjusting for inflation, total funding fell by more than 20% since 2007-2009.*





Over **11,500** students served between 2019-2021

- Autism Spectrum Disorder 8400
- Blind/Visually Impaired 900
- Deafblind 150
- Deaf or hard of hearing 1700
- Orthopedic Impairment 1600
- Traumatic Brain Injury 250

More than half of students have multiple regional eligibilities.

Advantages

- Assembling regional teams with deep levels of expertise and specialized licensure ensures Oregon students receive critical services despite national shortages of trained personnel.
- Creating an economy of scale to serve students with the most complex needs in their neighborhood schools regardless of size or location of district.
- Assuring quality and continuity of service for Oregon's most complex and critically impacted children.

Parent Testimonials

“Regional Services have had a tremendous impact on the quality of education and resources my child receives. The program guided us through every step of the services process and allowed our daughter to receive proper education, audiology services and speech therapy.

The entire staff from the counselors, the deaf educators, the speech-language therapists, and audiologists have become our village of support allowing our daughter to make great strides and avoid falling behind academically, socially and vocally while keeping up with her technology needs. We have met and connected with many other families who have also benefited from these important programs.”

-Ana



“Regional Services have been life changing for my family. Their highly skilled team provides services to my kids that helped them learn how to talk and hear, something I never thought possible. Both of my children have profound hearing loss and when we moved to Oregon several years ago, they could only communicate with sign language. They had never worn hearing aids that worked for them. I had given up hope on verbal communication. The staff fit them with a different brand of hearing aids and suddenly my kids were listening and starting to talk.

There are so many options for my kids that I would have not known existed without guidance from Regional Programs.”

-Alexandra