

April 26, 2021

Dear Representative Alonso Leon and Members of the House Education Committee:

We are writing in support of Senate Bill 53 which directs the Department of Education to conduct a study related to special education programs including Regional Programs for students who have a visual impairment, are deaf or hard of hearing, are deafblind, have an orthopedic impairment, have autism spectrum disorder, or have traumatic brain injury.

Oregon's Regional Programs serve over 11,000 children and students from birth to 21. Children served by Regional Programs are among the most impacted children served in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE), kindergarten through high school special education, and community transition services. Regional Programs work with these other special education services to provide needed specialized services for children and students who experience visual impairment, orthopedic impairment, deafness or hard of hearing, traumatic brain injury and/or autism spectrum disorder. These students need differentiated instruction so they can access a quality education in their home district regardless of ability. Regional Programs provide specialized instruction, training, technical tools, and additional support to children, students, and educators so that all schools, no matter their size or location, can deliver an inclusive education.

While funding for EI/ECSE and K-12 special education (through the low-incidence, high-cost disability fund) have been increased with the Student Success Act, Regional Programs have experienced a 20% reduction in funding (when adjusted for inflation) since 2007-2009. In their 2021 report, the Quality Education Commission noted that "When adjusted for inflation, per student funding fell by more than 33 percent." (page 22)

The purpose of the study is a first step toward articulating the resources needed for Regional Programs to serve all eligible children well. The study will provide a comprehensive report to the Legislature which provides a clear definition of the children served, develops a method for funding the program, and addresses issues necessary for the long-term success of regional services to eligible children and students across the state. Specifically, the study shall address:

- a. How special education/regional programs are currently provided on a local, county or regional basis;
- b. Changes in law or practice that would improve how special education/regional program services are provided on a local, county or regional basis; and
- c. Efficient and effective funding methods for providing special education/regional programs on a local, county or regional basis.

The Oregon Legislature took a similar approach in 2007, when they contracted with Dr. Thomas Parrish to commission a study on funding for EI/ECSE, Regional Programs, and other special education services. The Parrish Report created the foundation for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education to establish criteria for Adequate Service

Levels and provided a roadmap for adequate funding and educational models to ensure the success of our young children with disabilities. This bill builds on that past work and makes further progress on Regional Programs recommendations.

We urge you to support the passage of SB 53.

