

Submitter: Heidi Robinson

Committee: Senate Committee On Education

Measure: SB633

Greetings Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

I am submitting testimony in opposition to SB 633. I have three children, one of whom experiences Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). I share my thoughts as an individual with no vested financial interest in a specific educational model that this bill would support.

As a former teacher and parent, I am interested in best practices in education. 40+ years of long-standing evidence-based research overwhelmingly shows that educating disabled students in the same classrooms as their non-disabled peers offers significantly higher long-term academic, social, and economic outcomes. It is the optimal and most direct pathway to living, working, and fully participating in the community, offering significantly higher long-term outcomes for students.

Sending students to segregated centers reinforces the outdated and painful history our nation has of segregating individuals with disabilities, with little regard for the harm that creates. The education system has excluded children with disabilities from the very beginning and unfortunately, too many districts and schools still resist inclusion. While some may see SB 633 as a way to address workforce shortages, it is done at the expense and sacrifice of students experiencing disabilities. SB 633 reinforces societal expectations founded in a history of exclusion and institutionalism. It supports the narrative that students experiencing disabilities cannot learn alongside their peers and should be kept separate. It reduces the social and academic contact students have with their non-disabled peers, and experience has taught us that this path only creates low expectations and outcomes, while further entrenching outdated beliefs and biases on disability. Our focus should be fully funding Oregon's schools so they can hire needed staff, and train teachers and support staff, so they have the resources and knowledge to support students experiencing disability in inclusive settings, following years of best teaching practices.

My daughter will one day work, live, and recreate in her community. Like all our children, we are teaching her that she can be a contributing member of her community. Her future begins now, learning alongside her peers. Every day our schools should be teaching all students what diverse, inclusive classrooms and communities look like and how to interact, support, and have friendships with individuals who are different from they are. The benefits of inclusive education are not just for students experiencing disabilities, but for their peers as well. Their lives will intersect with disability in many ways – they may have a child who experiences a disability or support aging parents who will one day experience a disability. They will one day work alongside individuals experiencing disabilities and have neighbors with disabilities. Understanding how to

interact with people who may seem different, who have different perspectives, and who experience the world differently than they do is a skill we all need to learn. Students should be learning how to respect and appreciate different perspectives, how to have friendships with people from all intersections of life, and how to appreciate and value diversity. These skills begin in an inclusive classroom and benefit everyone. When we sacrifice inclusion, we limit everyone's potential as human beings.

Inclusive education is a fundamental civil right of all learners, regardless of disability status. We learned many years ago that separate is not equal. We should reject any model or idea that creates separate, segregated centers of education. Participation in inclusive schools and communities provides students with and without disabilities the experience of a society that values and includes all its citizens.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Heidi Robinson
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