



Mission: Empower Oregon families experiencing disability in their pursuit of a whole life by expanding awareness, growing community, and equipping families.

March 23, 2023

Chair Dembrow

Vice-Chair Weber

Members of the Senate Committee on Education

RE: Opposition of SB 633 – Regional Centers for Special Education and Related Services

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your dedication and patience as FACT Oregon and I have navigated the complexities of the “long legislative session.” Your understanding during this fast-paced process has been invaluable. FACT Oregon is a non-profit organization dedicated a future where communities are accessible to, inclusive of, and empower the self-determination of, people with disabilities. We strive to be a collaborative partner in the spheres of disability and education, including special education. FACT Oregon believes that every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. We are committed to providing families with the tools and information they need to make that happen.

We are writing today to express our strong opposition to SB 633, which would create a new segregated school system for students experiencing disabilities. This bill fundamentally contradicts our core belief that every individual, regardless of the barriers placed in their path by an ableist society, should have access to their school and community. Inclusive education, defined as all students learning together in the same classroom with appropriate support, has been consistently shown to improve academic outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities ([Hehir et al., 2016](#)). It also fosters social and emotional development, increased participation in extracurricular activities, a sense of belonging, and understanding and tolerance of diversity.

After careful consideration and communication with the bill’s proponents, FACT Oregon has concluded that SB 633 is a step backwards for Oregon. Instead of directing resources and investments towards segregated settings, we advocate for a focus on inclusive solutions that will benefit all students. Organizations like the [SWIFT Education Center](#) have developed evidence-based resources that promote inclusive education and can enhance the professional development of educators. SWIFT Education Center already has a long-standing relationship with Oregon schools.

One example highlighting the negative impact of segregated settings is the story of Rachel, a young girl with Down syndrome. For most of her school experience, Rachel was segregated due to disruptive behaviors such as yelling, cursing, or “fussing” as they would call it. She had minimal if any interaction with her peers **without** disabilities. Despite her mother Katherine’s pleas to consider more opportunities for Rachel to achieve academic rigor and to be with her nondisabled peers, Rachel was provided coloring sheets in a segregated setting. In addition, many of Rachel’s educators had low expectations and lacked skills to meet Rachel’s needs.



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After successfully advocating in high school for more inclusion with her nondisabled peers, Rachel was placed in an inclusive setting. Rachel has joined her school's choir and has competed on the high school swim team for the last two years. Rachel participates in Unified Sports, was voted to the prom court this year and has met rigorous academic goals. Katherine attributes this "all to inclusion" and says, "What a difference it makes when Rachel is given an opportunity"

In June 2023, Rachel will graduate with a modified diploma from her neighborhood high school. She looks forward to taking college courses and participating in the Community Transition Program. In one year, Rachel's academic performance and social skills improved dramatically, illustrating the importance of fostering an inclusive environment. Unfortunately, Rachel lost 9 years in a segregated setting instead of 'flourishing'.

We urge the Senate Committee on Education to vote no on SB 633, consider the compelling body of research supporting inclusive education, and invest in research-based best practices and professional development that will benefit all students.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of our perspective.

Christy Reese
Executive Director
FACT Oregon