

Submitter: Heather Gemmer  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2953

I support this bill as I am a neurodiverse parent of two autistic children in the public school setting here in Portland, Oregon. Over the last 6 years of navigating this educational system, it's clear that the SPED teams desperately need MORE support and funding! My children are supposed to have daily check-ins from their main SPED coordinator, but her caseload is so high that she is almost never available to them unless things get really bad. This leaves my children with daily dysregulation in their classrooms and interrupted learning for both them and their classmates. Their grades continue to remain low borderline and their foundation for school and learning remains stressful and difficult to navigate. We have been forced to use grocery money to pay for additional services and my husband switched to being a part-time employee at his job so that he and I would always have one caregiver available to go to school to help regulate and support our kids, as we cannot count on the SPED team being available. It has caused us financial distress, but we'd do anything to support our kids. When my child required a certain type of toilet seat to be installed in our elementary school, I personally had to go and purchase it and bring it to the school in order to trust that his needs were met. When you underfund the SPED team, it directly affects the REST of the learning environment. Clearly, our educational scores across the State reflect that we NEED more support!

Oregon Department of Education data shows that up to a quarter of special needs students are not counted in the formula that provides additional special education funding to schools, due to a 30-year-old law capping spending on special education. The cap on SPED funding was implemented in the 1990s. That current cap only funds special education services for up to 11% of students in a school, even though today nearly 15% of students in the average Oregon school are enrolled in special education programs. 17% of PPS students receive special education services. Underfunding of special education shortchanges the needs of students with special needs, including students who have physical, developmental and learning disabilities like Autism and Dyslexia.

In conclusion, our family begs of you to hear our advocacy and we support this bill to remove the cap!

With desperate advocacy,  
Heather Gemmer