

House Committee on Education

Chair, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sarah Buckmaster, and I am a parent of three daughters who attend their neighborhood schools in the Portland Public School District. I also serve as a member on the Family Advisory Council on Education for PPS. Today, I am writing to advocate for the passage of HB 2953 and to urge the Legislature to prioritize full funding for special education services in Oregon.

As a parent, I have seen firsthand the importance of inclusive education—where students with higher needs, whether it's dyslexia, autism, or other learning disabilities, learn alongside their general education peers. Studies show that inclusive education benefits all students. Research suggests that students with disabilities perform better academically, develop stronger social skills, and gain confidence when included in general education classrooms with appropriate support. At the same time, their peers grow in empathy, leadership, and understanding without any detriment to their own academic progress.

However, there is a gap between policy and practice. While inclusive education is federally mandated, it is not fully funded. Teachers in Portland public schools are asked to manage classrooms with students who have vastly different learning styles and needs, often without adequate training, support, or additional staff. Special education and general education teachers alike are stretched thin, and this impacts every student in the classroom. If we believe that full inclusion is the best path forward, we must ensure that both students and teachers are set up for success.

Inclusive education is federally mandated, but without full funding, Oregon schools face an uphill battle. How can we ensure success for both students and teachers without the necessary resources? Without proper support, inclusion can become a burden rather than a benefit. Oregon must recognize that meeting this federal mandate requires more than compliance—it requires real investment. When done well, inclusive education benefits all students, but success depends on providing adequate resources, training, and support for teachers.

That is why I am testifying in support of HB 2953. This bill is a critical step toward ensuring that schools receive the resources needed to adequately support our special education students. I want to thank Representative Pham for helping to bring this issue forward, and I strongly encourage the Oregon Legislature to support this bill. Our students deserve a fair chance to succeed, and adequate funding is the key to making that happen.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Buckmaster
NE Portland Resident