

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Dobson, Vice-Chair McIntire, and Members of the Committee;

I am a parent of 2 Portland Public School (PPS) students and an active volunteer at Marysville Elementary School. **I am writing to express my strong endorsement of HB 2953 to lift the 11% cap on special education (SpEd) services.**

Our title 1 neighborhood elementary school exemplifies why the current 11% cap is insufficient. In total, about 25% of our students require special education services this year—more than twice the number funded under the 11% cap.

The Impact of Underfunding

One of the most urgent consequences of under-funding special education is a rise in “big behaviors” among students. I have seen this manifesting at Marysville. There are kids tantruming in the halls. There are multiple classrooms where “room clears” happen regularly. When this happens the whole class must leave the classroom due to one child’s behavior. This disrupts learning for all students.

Another consequence is educator burnout. One of our most beloved teachers resigned over winter break due to escalating big behaviors that resulted in her getting a black eye. She had been at Marysville for many years, and now she’s gone. And, I am worried others will follow. Marysville has an incredible staff, many of whom have been there for 10+ years. But, working in a school, where high-needs students and extreme behaviors are common, and students aren’t getting the support they need, is wearing on them.

Why HB 2953 Matters

For years, PPS as a whole has had an average of 17% of students requiring SpEd services—far exceeding the 11% cap. If the legislature sets a new, but still arbitrary, cap—even one above 11%—we risk letting students down yet again.

These students are our future. Quality of education is directly linked to other issues our society faces such as homelessness, poverty, unemployment, addiction, mental health issues, etc. We must support these children now so that they can be healthy, thriving members of our society.

Again, I strongly endorse HB 2953. Let’s lift the cap entirely rather than replacing it with a new limit. Oregon must fund the actual number of students who need services. Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue, and for seeking public input. I care a lot about our youth and appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts.

Sincerely,

Nicole Bendotoff