

Submitter: Eriko Ono  
On Behalf Of: my son Kenji and all the disabled students  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2953

Hello,

I am writing to support HB2953, removing the cap on state funding for Special Education. I do not understand why such a cap exists. Portland Public Schools, which both of my teenagers have attended since kindergarten, has at least 17% of students receiving Special Education services. This figure likely under represents the current need for services. And this number is growing. More and more preschool aged children are identified as needing services before they even begin kindergarten. We need to invest in supports to help all children succeed.

My son is an intellectually disabled student at Grant High School in Portland. He has been in self contained classrooms since he was in 1st grade. I support his placement in an Intensive Skills Classroom due to the nature of his disabilities. However, there are many, many students who could be in General Education classrooms and included in their broader school communities. But there is a prevalent barrier- the lack of supports, primarily paraeducators, behavior supports, and staff training. And the lack of support is constantly justified by "there isn't enough budget for staffing." Students reach the point of crisis in many cases where parents have no choice but to reduce or remove their kids from their schools. These crises are preventable. This is not a Free and Appropriate Education that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act states children with disabilities have a right to. Parents shouldn't have to be forced to decide do I keep my child in school and endanger their health and well being or do I remove them, keep them safe, and figure out how to educate them some other way.

In high school, the ISC students are given a fraction of the options for the vast elective options that the rest of the student body has opportunities to take. And that is because our disabled students are grouped together in select classes so that paraeducators can be spread across multiple students. These students have IEPs that are not being followed because they don't have the accommodations they need to attend gen ed classes. We are failing these students. And the segregation and isolation of students with disabilities that happens within our schools is where ableism is first practiced. We learn early on that people with disabilities don't belong in our classrooms and then our communities. Classrooms become ability based and that carries over into the world outside- in our social spaces, businesses and workplaces. If we don't grow up and learn along side people with disabilities, then we do not get the chance to include and connect with them.

Parents of children with disabilities are some of the hardest working, resilient, and resourceful people I have had the honor of knowing. We have to advocate and fight for our kids in practically all systems- medical, education, state services, entertainment... you name it, we've had to put in the work. We will roll up our sleeves and work towards better schools if you let us. I know when we can have schools appropriately resourced ALL students and staff can thrive together and we will be a stronger community.

-Eriko Ono  
PPS parent and advocate