

Submitter: Hazel Wheeler

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2953

Our family wants you the Oregon Legislature to know that we fully support HB2953, to remove the 11% cap on special education spending.

Many students and families lives are impacted by neurodiversity, learning differences, learning disorders, and trauma. Most especially now, after years of wildfires, a pandemic, and learning losses, we need our special education funded more realistically. Nearly 15% of our students in Oregon qualify for special education services. Many students aren't even offered special education services for some learning differences, like dyslexia and dysgraphia (Portland Public Schools), so some of the most basic needs aren't being addressed.

Now, with possible cuts to Medicare funding/reimbursement, and the likely dissolution of the Federal Department of Education, we will be facing serious funding gaps. These shortfalls must be prudently anticipated to ensure all students who qualify for SPED services can access them. I've also spoken to people working for our district as paraeducators and say that more training would be helpful in working with vulnerable student populations who rely on them for intimate needs.

Our own family had been positively impacted by the SPED offerings, Section 504 protections, and an IEP, which has been integral in our student's willingness to attend school. The 'right' sort of school day is going to look differently for differing student needs. Having more of a budget allows for the time to meet with our student's instructors and craft a plan that keeps our student (who has neurodiversity and mental health needs) attending school to graduation. These essential conversations will go to improve Oregon's graduation rate, if we prioritize the future of our students and state.

Our SPED professionals are an overworked, highly committed group of teachers who are often given more cases than they can handle. Eventually, unsupported, overworked talent will go to work in the private sector, at schools with more supportive funding and student/teacher workload ratios. I know neighbors and friends who have worked in that system, who tell me that even getting basic needs met for our students is a fight, nearly every time. We can't boast about Oregon's policies that protect our citizens without ensuring that all citizens have access to a fair and equal education. Our teachers, students with special education needs, and their families all deserve to be considered during this critical time.

Thank you for your time in this matter.

Go Oregon!

Hazel Wheeler

housewife, early childhood educator and mother