

FULLY FUNDING SPECIAL EDUCATION



CORE ISSUE

For decades, Oregon has strived to create a public school system where every student thrives. An inclusive school system means that students experiencing disability are provided with access to a full range of special education (SpEd) services and are included in general education classrooms as often as possible with schools and educators who can meet their needs.

Over time, Oregon has broadened our definition of which students need support, and the kinds of support individual students need. For example, our understanding of diagnosis for students on the neurodiversity spectrum – such as autism and dyslexia – has changed drastically since that time, resulting in a greater number of students receiving an accurate diagnosis to qualify for specialized services. This means it's time to revisit the way we fund special education from birth through 12th grade.

SpEd funding in Oregon has not kept up with the need to support our students. The result is that SpEd programs and supports in Oregon are now underfunded by around **\$700m per biennium.**

SOLUTIONS

Fully funding special education means improving funding to four major SpEd funding streams.

1. Special Education Cap Funding | HB 2953 | Investment: Approx. \$400-450M

The cap was created in 1991, when the average population of students receiving special education services for a school district was calculated at 11%. Since then, as we have grown to better understand student needs, the state average is now 14.8%. Some districts approach 18% or higher. But just moving the cap without an investment to pay for the additional weights does not account for the costs to serve our students with disabilities. That is why all the new weights created by raising the cap need to be funded as well.

2. Increase High-Cost Disability Grants HB 2448 | Investment: \$200M

HCD grants allow districts to apply for funds that directly support students who need significantly higher levels of support to access right to a public education. For example, a student who needs one-on-one support could be eligible. Current funding for students with the most significant special education needs only covers about 40% of expenditures. Additive funding is needed to reimburse 100% of the costs to provide critical services to students.

3. Increase Support for Regional Inclusive Services | Budget Item | Investment: \$52M

Regional Inclusive Services (RIS) supports children and students who experience low incidence disabilities, including: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Visually Impaired, Deafblind, Orthopedic Impairments, and Traumatic Brain Injuries; many of these children experience multiple disabilities and require highly specialized equipment and trained staff to access their education program.

4. Increase Support for Early Intervention Services | Budget Item | Investment: \$24M

Early Intervention Services (EI) serves children birth to age 3 and Early Childhood Special Education (ESCE) serves children aged 3 to 5. Both programs prepare children with disabilities and delays for kindergarten and beyond. This investment would restore the current Adequate Service Level estimate, and HB 2682 would look at those estimates, which haven't been updated in 15 years.

TOTAL FUNDING NEED: about \$700m.

