



February 17, 2025

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the House Committee on Education:

On behalf of Portland Public Schools, **we urge you to prioritize investments in special education this legislative session by passing HB 2953 and HB 2448.**

Our state public school system must build funding structures that reflect our values, best practices, and commitment to meeting the needs of **all** our students. The current cap on special education funding, along with the absence of funding for students who require a greater level of services, is inequitable, uncommon, and shortchanges students with disabilities.

**HB 2953** is an essential bill that will provide more resources to students receiving special education services. The Oregon State School Fund uses a complex and outdated formula that allocates a double weight for students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) but caps the number of students a district can count. The Legislature established the special education funding cap in 1991 at 11%, roughly the state and national average when the State School Fund was created, but has never increased it, even as the number of students receiving special education services across the state has gone up. For the 2024-25 school year, **17% of Portland Public Schools students receive special education services.** As a result, Portland Public Schools will spend nearly **\$25 million** beyond all state and federal special education funding out of our General Fund to ensure that students receiving special education services have the support and resources they need and deserve.

[Oregon is only one of a handful of states that has a flat cap on funding for students with disabilities.](#) Most states don't cap funds at this level because it leaves districts on their own to make up the difference and inadequately serves children with disabilities. It is time that we change this and ensure that districts have the resources they need to adequately serve their students with disabilities. We also ask that the state make this a meaningful investment, **by pairing the removal of the 11% cap with the appropriate level of funding.**

PPS serves many students who need more support than the state school fund formula for special education can provide. That is where **HB 2448** comes in. This is a critical bill that



supports school districts with costs that go beyond the special education cap and the double IEP weight that we urge you to support.

In the 2022-23 school year, there were 1,213 students in PPS who received special education programming services that cost more than \$30,000 per student, at a range of \$35,000 to \$500,000 per student. The total cost of these students' programs amounted to more than \$60 million. These costs cover key staff like nurses and paraeducators, and in some cases, residential programs. Each of the programs were submitted to the High Cost Disability fund. PPS was able to seek 40% reimbursement of \$24 million this year and was ultimately awarded \$9 million from the program.

As the largest urban district in the state, in a region with a wide variety of medical clinics and healthcare services, we have more students in high-cost programs compared to other districts across the state. We must ensure that we have the resources to provide students with disabilities with the educational opportunities they are guaranteed under Oregon law and the federal Individuals With Disabilities Education Act.

Oregon should stand out among the states for bold policy that equitably serves all students who qualify for special education services. System changes like those in HB 2953 and HB 2448 will go a long way toward showing Oregon's students that we value them and are genuinely committed to their well-being and future success.

Please support HB 2953 and HB 2448 this session. Thank you.

Sincerely,

- Dr. Kimberlee Armstrong, Superintendent
- Chair Edward Wang
- Vice-Chair Michelle DePass
- Director Julia Brim-Edwards
- Director Herman Greene
- Director Gary Hollands
- Director Christy Splitt
- Director Patte Sullivan
- Student Representative JJ Kunsevi