

February 17th, 2025

**To:** House Committee on Education

**From:** Angela Bonilla, President, Portland Association of Teachers

**Re:** Support for HB 2953 to remove the cap on amounts distributed from State School Fund to school districts for students eligible for special education as children with disabilities.

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs McIntire and Dobson, and members of the committee—

My name is Angela Bonilla, and I am a bilingual Instructional Coach at Scott School and am currently serving as the President of the Portland Association of Teachers. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in front of you today to express my support for HB 2953 and removing the cap on amounts distributed from the state school fund to school districts for students eligible for special education.

2 years ago, I was here talking about HB 2895, a bill to remove the cap amounts distributed from the state school fund to school districts for students eligible for special education. I will be honest: we have tried to do everything we can to move our district to invest in special education with staffing and training, it was one of the reasons we went on a 15 day strike in November 2023. Unfortunately, at this point, the need is higher than the funds available.

At PPS, we currently have between 16-20% of our students currently receiving or in the pipeline to receive Special Education Services. Right now, the state school fund only provides additional funding up to 11% of the student population. Even with the exception of that cap that provides additional funding, our district has shared that still only bumps us to about 15%. This causes a disparity which hinders our ability to provide the services our students need.

In special education, we talk a lot about following the data and not pre-determining the placement or fate of our students. The students and families show us what they need and we use our expertise to decide how to serve those students. Unfortunately, our funding from the state does not follow the data. If we have a larger population of students with needs, or do work to reduce the biases that may interpret certain behaviors as violent vs as a call for help or a manifestation of a disability, we will not be provided the funding needed to serve those students before us.

Even the current cap – 11% – is incongruent with the data. The US Department of Education data shows 15% of students nationally were identified for special education services as of 2020-2021. In Oregon, that percentage is about 16%. In PPS, that percentage is even higher. That means that the current model forces districts to choose which students to prioritize, and pre-determines the level of support available for students based on funding as opposed to providing the level of support based on need. This is unethical and forces our educators to make difficult choices: Attempt to follow each student's Identified Education Plan despite the lack of staff, time and resources to do so, or admit it is impossible to fulfill the IEP and put their license in jeopardy.

In addition to raising the cap, we need more funding allocated to the State School Fund in order to support a lifted cap. Lifting the cap and increasing the State School Fund to support current Special Education levels at our schools will ensure that we have the funding necessary to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education for all students, a cornerstone of IDEA.

We call on our elected officials to join us in stitching a new garment, having a different vision for our kids, and believing in our ability to do better by our students. You do this by removing the cap on Special Education disbursements and by increasing the state school fund to meet the increased need. Our students deserve a quality education and we should not rob Paul to pay Peter; Now is the time to invest in our students and our future. It is time to build a new normal, one that ensures each student gets what they need to access their education.

I encourage the committee to support HB 2953 and increase funding to the State School Fund to match the increased need. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Angela Bonilla  
President  
Portland Association of Teachers