

RE: Support For HB 2953

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

I am writing in support of HB 2953 and removing the cap on Special Education (SPED) funding. Oregon's current funding cap system for Special Education (SPED) is both unfair due to the way funding is handed out, and inadequate due to the deficits. Asking schools to cover these costs out of general operating budgets in the midst of the PERS crises and increasing needs is effectively destroying the quality and sanctity of our schools. Change cannot wait.

1. Simple Math Doesn't Tell the Story
  - a. The perceived 4% funding gap is not accurate nor fair. In some districts or schools the funding gap is closer to 25%, placing those schools in crisis.
2. Evidence Shows High Poverty Schools Have Disproportionate Numbers of Disabilities
  - a. Our current financial allocation of special education funding doesn't recognize that a correlation even exists between poverty and disability, let alone address root causes.
  - b. Small and rural school districts are unable to absorb the additional costs of high poverty percentages and high disability percentages.
3. IDEA Implications Rolled Out Regardless of Whether Or Not The Federal Government Adequately Funds It
  - a. Families struggle to support their kids under IDEA in high poverty schools, adding stress not support. This is, in part, due to the exhaustion clause under IDEA.
  - b. Administrators cannot be frank about the dire needs in their school district because to do so would make their district vulnerable to lawsuits under FAPE, and no teacher can give specific examples due to HIPAA.
  - c. Demands of paying for SPED supports that are legally mandated, without proper funding, forces districts to take money out of their general education funds to meet needs, thus reducing quality for all students.
4. There is a Well-Documented Increase in Student Need for SPED Services Overall
  - a. Anecdotally speaking, educators have seen a huge jump in students entering school who are still in diapers or arrive with Family Support Plans (FSPS) in the last two years.
  - b. There has been a steady increase of percentages of students with autism and ADHD over the last 30 years with no increase in funding.
  - c. The state recommended that all students with ADHD have a 504 plan, thus increasing the number of parents involved in their child's education. The number of meetings increases the demand on personnel hours. Additionally, there is an increase in requests for more accommodations and testing as parents attend these meetings. It's absolutely imperative that we adequately support our students with ADHD, but that statement also comes with increased expenses.

5. Districts With High Poverty Need Increased Funding Overall
  - a. Low-income students overall need at least 40% more resources than their peers to receive an adequate education. Title 1 funding only adds a small portion of that.
  - b. In 2021 the child poverty rate more than doubled, according to the U.S. Census
  - c. Rural and small districts have less resources to compensate for funding gaps created by the discrepancies created between need and the funding cap for SPED.
6. The PERS Crisis Limits Districts' Abilities to Address Funding Gaps
  - a. The PERS crisis has not gone away, and is expected to continue to intensify until a peak around the year 2028. For the next decade or so, school districts will not feel reprieve from the PERS crisis. While we may not be able to eliminate the PERS crisis, we must acknowledge when we have other systems that may contribute to the financial deprivation of our school districts.
7. The National Teacher Shortage is Most Pronounced Within SPED
  - a. SPED teachers in high poverty schools have caseloads that are multiple times higher than low poverty schools.
  - b. SPED departments have higher turnover rates than other departments, adding to administration expenses.

Please continue to support Oregon schools by recognizing that the 11% cap on SPED funding is an antiquated rule that must be eliminated. Furthermore, please fully fund SPED services based on current service levels, and empower our students who receive SPED services to succeed in education.

Sincerely,

Mary Randall  
1st and 2nd Grade Teacher