

2/14/2025

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

For the record, my name is Danielle Marino and I am a member of the Oregon School Employees Association. I am an Emotional Behavior Assistant at Metzger Elementary School in Tigard, Oregon and I am the Chapter 51 Secretary. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB 2953 to raise the cap on special education funding.

I have worked in the Tigard School District for the past 20 years. Over that time, I have witnessed significant changes in special education, particularly in the level of inclusion our schools can provide.

When I first started in Tigard, we had the staff and resources to ensure that every special education student was included in the general education classroom. This allowed students to learn alongside their peers, benefiting from both academic instruction and essential social interactions. Unfortunately, in recent years, we have not had the funding necessary to hire enough staff to maintain this level of inclusion. As a result, we now have situations where three or four students are placed with one staff member in a separate classroom, limiting their educational opportunities and peer engagement.

Currently, I work with children who do not qualify for an IEP and, in some cases, not even a 504 plan. Many of these students have experienced trauma and need additional support, yet we lack the resources to provide them with the help they deserve.

Special education funding has not kept pace with the growing needs of our most vulnerable students. The 11% cap on special education funding prevents districts from fully supporting all students who require services. By removing this cap, we can take a meaningful step toward ensuring that every student—regardless of ability—has access to the resources, support, and staffing they need to thrive.

I urge you to support House Bill 2953 and help us create a school system where all students have an equitable chance to succeed. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Danielle Marino, Emotional Behavior Support Assistant, Metzger Elementary School.