

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Walters, and Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

We, the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs, support HB 2953, which will remove the cap allocated to special education. This is important since the last funding formula increase was in 2005, or twenty years ago. According to current research, the federal government and state municipalities in Oregon and nationwide have underfunded public education for decades. Yet, when budget cuts occur, we often lose support services for our most vulnerable disabled students and those living below the poverty line. The passage of this bill will bring hope and optimism for a better future for these students.

Here are a few of the impacts of underfunding special education:

1. Understaffing leads to high caseloads and teacher burnout.
2. Inadequate testing materials for Black/African American, English Language Learners, and students labeled other health-impaired
3. Another example of disproportionality is that Eastern Oregon has four autism specialists for 125 students.
4. Limited resources for specialized instruction, tools, and materials
5. Integration challenges include inadequate staffing to support students engaging with peers of the same age and grade in general education.
6. Inequitable services across districts - mainly rural and low-income districts- are disproportionately underserved.

The Oregon Department of Education and the State must address this inequality to ensure all students, regardless of their background or location, have equal opportunities for learning. This is not just a matter of policy, but a matter of fairness and justice that we must uphold.

<https://oregoned.org/advocating-change/new-from-oea/spotlight-special-education>

<https://www.ijpr.org/education/2024-07-20/an-existential-moment-as-oregons-public-schools-struggle-with-budget-shortfalls>

