

03/21/2025

Joint Subcommittee on Education
Oregon State Legislature

Subject: Testimony in Support of Increased Funding for EI/ECSE and Regional Inclusive Services

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Education,

I am submitting this testimony as an Itinerant Teacher of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired (TSVI) with Northwest Regional ESD, as well as the statewide Teacher on Special Assignment providing mentoring to TSVIs throughout the state of Oregon. I am writing to urge you to fully fund Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) and Regional Inclusive Services to ensure equitable access to education for students with disabilities in Oregon, including those who are blind or have low vision.

The current funding situation severely limits our ability to meet the needs of students with visual impairments, especially in rural areas of Southern Oregon where specialized services are spread very thin. As a long-time resident of this region and a mentor serving students across the state, I have witnessed firsthand the detrimental impact of insufficient resources on rural students and their families. My colleagues and I strive to provide tailored instruction, necessary accommodations, and crucial support to these students. However, our efforts are hampered by overwhelmingly large caseloads and insufficient time with each student, preventing us from delivering the level of individualized attention and instruction they need to thrive academically and socially. This disparity in resources and support creates a significant disadvantage for rural students with visual impairments, who rightfully deserve the same educational opportunities as their urban counterparts. The inequity is stark and calls for immediate attention to ensure all students, regardless of their geographic location, can access the specialized services they require to succeed.

Students with visual impairments rely heavily on specialized equipment, assistive technology, and adapted materials to fully engage in their education. However, due to budget constraints, these essential resources are frequently delayed or entirely unavailable, significantly hindering their learning process.

Early Intervention plays a crucial role for families with a newly diagnosed child who is blind or has low vision. In this context, a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI) is an essential team member, uniquely positioned to address the emotional impact of such a diagnosis. Many families require support to navigate the complex emotions, including grief and uncertainty, that often accompany learning about their child's visual impairment.

Unfortunately, the resources needed to provide this vital emotional and practical support are scarce. This scarcity is a direct result of inadequate funding in both the Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) and Regional Inclusive Services programs. Consequently, families and children who desperately need these services are left without the comprehensive support they require during a critical period of development and adjustment.

To address these urgent needs, I urge the Legislature to:

- Adequately fund special education for children under 5 (EI/ECSE) at \$432.8 million.
- Increase the special education cap in the State School Fund formula from 11% to 15%.
- Provide 100% reimbursement to school districts for high-cost disabilities.

- Adequately fund Regional Inclusive Services at \$122.4 million.

Without these investments, we are failing our students, their families, and the educators dedicated to their success. I respectfully urge you to prioritize funding for these essential services. Thank you for your time and your commitment to Oregon's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "April Love".

April Love
Itinerant Teacher of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired
TOSA - Statewide TSVI Mentor
Northwest Regional ESD