

My name is Stephanie Karpouzes. I am the Special Education Coordinator for the Blind and Visually Impaired Team at Northwest Regional Education Service District (NWRES D) in Hillsboro, OR. Before this role, I spent 16 years as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired and an Orientation & Mobility Specialist, working with hundreds of children across the Portland Metro area, from birth to age 21.

I am writing today to advocate for full funding of **Regional Inclusive Services (RIS)**. The request is that RIS programs be funded \$122 million which is the recommended service levels to adequately fund the program analyzed with SB 52. NWRES D, through a state grant outlined in the ORS, provides critical support to students with low-incidence disabilities, including blindness, deafness, autism, traumatic brain injury, orthopedic impairments, and deafblindness. RIS serves around 3,000 students in my region from Beaverton to Astoria and over 13,000 students statewide.

RIS helps school districts provide essential but costly services like specialized instruction, 1:1 support, adaptive technology, and braille production—that they otherwise couldn't afford. Without RIS, schools would have to pull from already strained general education funds, leaving many students without the tools they need to succeed.

I have personally worked with 100s of students in the Portland metro area whose lives were transformed by these services. The following are a handful of students who I have worked with.

- A student with **albinism** struggled to read standard text and needed all materials enlarged. With RIS support, she learned to use electronic magnifiers and self-advocate for her needs. We even had to petition the SAT board for her accommodations. She went on to be one of the top students in her class and is now studying law.
- A **blind toddler** didn't move until age two because she didn't realize there was a world beyond her reach. With specialized instruction, physical therapy, and braille education, she learned to navigate her environment, use a cane, and read and write in braille. She was fully included in general education and thrived.
- A student who **lost his sight due to cancer** who was also diagnosed with autism and had a hearing loss. RIS provided adaptive technology, expert consultation, and 1:1 support so he could remain in the same grade as his peers.
- A student with **cerebral palsy** needed specialized equipment to move independently and adapted materials to learn effectively. With RIS support, he accessed communication devices to talk with classmates, listen to books, and participate in games. Later, he learned job skills with the right supports in place.

Yet, despite these successes, RIS remains **underfunded**. This has huge impacts in our ability to help support these students have the same opportunities and success as their peers. For instance, my team serves 15 braille-learning students, but we have only **two braillists and two instructional assistants**—nowhere near enough to ensure timely access to materials. Some districts even have to cover braille production costs themselves, which can exceed **\$30,000 for a single textbook**.

Oregon's commitment to equity means ensuring **all students—regardless of disability, race, or location—have the same opportunities**. Fully funding RIS would guarantee that every child receives the support they need to succeed. **I urge you to make this a priority.**