

March 6, 2013

Honorable Representatives,

I would be remiss if I did not write with gratitude to express the impact that the BVIS fund has provided for both me and my students. I am a Teacher of the Visually Impaired. I am very thankful to the State of Oregon and its higher institutions that provided me with an opportunity to further my education to become a certified teacher to work with students who are blind or visually impaired. It has been a wonderful exchange of resources with the closing of the Oregon School for the Blind to divert these funds to increase the learning and benefit to Oregon's Blind or Visually Impaired Students. Through BVIS funds two students I currently work with were able to attend a summer camp program. Since the majority of our service time is in the classroom we were able to address additional skills that are part of what we call the Extended Core Curriculum for visually impaired children to give direct instruction for areas in their lives that other children may learn or be exposed to visually. 90% of what we learn is learned visually through observation and then modeling. How do you make a bed when every side of a sheet feels the same? Close your eyes and think about making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. These students were able to expand their horizons and learn life enhancing skills that were once more easily provided in a residential setting but can be granted through opportunities such as this provided by the BVIS fund. These students were campers hiking down a hill to go fishing, singing songs around a campfire, and making s'mores by the glow of the fire and a starlit night. Camp is nearly a weekly topic of discussion for my youngest student who would sing "Barges" at any opportunity afforded her.

Some of my students have been large print readers. A large print textbook is approximately the dimensions of ledger size paper ( 11"x17" ) and 2 inches thick. It often takes at least 3 volumes this size to make up one textbook of regular print. They can be cumbersome and we joke about all of the muscles Teachers of the Visually Impaired develop delivering and then gathering up all of these materials at the beginning and end of each school year (Braille materials are another story) but think of the student. Through the BVIS fund I have students who now have downloaded textbooks on i-pads they can enlarge to fit their visual needs with audio back up in a compact form. Smart Board Presentation and Power Point presentations become difficult for Visually Impaired students, as well. Through an application these students are able to access the presentation directly through an invitation from the teacher to join their computer for the sole purpose of viewing and have this information on their i-pad at their desktop immediately. This they can also enlarge for easier viewing.

I am also very grateful for the professional development opportunity I was afforded to attend an international conference for professionals in my field. It was a once in a life time opportunity I could not have financed on my own. I was able to meet and discuss and learn from the top professionals in my field, those in the forefront for technology produced and being produced for the blind and visually impaired community, and learn applicable strategies and how to use resources I have been able to apply directly with students this school year.

Please also note that I am concerned. The educational impact of the functional vision for a student who is blind and visually impaired is great. Often the most significant impact relates to their near viewing ability such as reading at their desk. My understanding of the changes proposed to the Blind and Visually Impaired Student Fund include a provision to pay for and provide vision screening to all of Oregon's students. These screenings often test distance only and catch students whose vision needs may then be corrected once they have the proper lenses prescribed. My professional experience only extends 6 years but among my colleagues I have never heard of a blind or visually impaired student identified through one of these screenings. Even with correction, the populations of students I work with are not able to access their education without supplementary aids, skills, accommodations, and or instruction. Screening may find more students that need correctable lenses to restore perfect to near perfect vision but would provide no service to those defined and outlined in Section 3 (1), Chapter 562, Oregon Laws 2009 or as part of OAR 581-015-2000 (4) (k). In fact, the cost to do the screenings could deplete the fund within a few short years robbing those who were intended to benefit from it the opportunities that were meant to expand their abilities and broaden possibilities.

Thank you for your service on our behalf and thank you for the life changing opportunities these funds have already provided. Please consider these concerns as well.

Sincerely,

Claudia Martin-Swapp