

Dear members of the House Education Committee,

I am a teacher of the visually impaired, licensed in the state of Oregon and teaching here for the past 10 years. I wish to contribute my thoughts about the benefits that the BVIS fund has provided my students- totally blind students, students with low vision, and my multi-handicapped students. I feel so grateful to the fund for its support of my students in providing tools, equipment, and opportunities that they would not have had if the BVIS fund did not support them.

Here are a few examples of what the fund has done for my students through its equipment purchases and funding for camps and events.

I had two totally blind students that for the first time last year, had the same opportunity to take the OAKS online test as their peers, with their peers, because of the BVIS funding. In the past, they could only take the braille embossed test which limited their opportunities to improve their score- they could only take it once, unlike their peers that had multiple opportunities to take it online. The refreshable braille display, the embosser, and the screen reading software enabled them to complete the test online. My 6th grade student sat in the same computer lab as her classmates to take the test, at the same time, and I was able to provide her with the tactile diagrams to accompany the test as she proceeded through the test. Having the embosser in her school was a tremendous advantage, as her braille materials were received from the Lane Braille center in an electronic file, which was then embossed at her school for timely braille production. These same two students attended a summer camp at Oral Hull, which was funded by BVIS. They each met new friends from another regional program, and had the opportunity to swim, ride horseback, fish, do archery, do a challenge rope course, ride tandem bikes, make their own breakfast and pack their own lunch, set tables, learn about technology, do crafts and woodworking, make their own beds and keep their rooms organized, make up skits and roast marshmallows at the evening campfires. They had a unique experience in that they were in their own peer group, all students had visual impairments, and it provided a great opportunity to develop social skills, as well as practice their orientation and mobility skills in new environments. Neither the equipment to take the OAKS test or the camp would have been possible without the BVIS fund.

My low vision students have benefited from the BVIS fund also. This year, the BVIS fund purchased iPads and apps for them. Instead of carrying around 11X17 heavy large print books, they can download both print and auditory books on their iPad; enlarge the font (and change the screen colors) to fit their needs, and read or listen to both their textbooks and leisure reading books. The typical handout/worksheet is 12 pt font, too small for my students, who have previously used a magnifier or CCTV to read print. It's now very easy with the iPad to take a picture of it and enlarge to exactly the size they need, and then save it to refer to it again later when doing homework. They can also take a picture of written work or math problems on the board, and enlarge it and save it. They have access right there at their desk to the online math student workbooks (which they can enlarge) and can fill in their answers on the iPad either by typing or handwriting, and can save it and email it to a teacher. They can take notes using apps that have enlarging capabilities and keep them organized so they can find them

easily. They can do voice activated internet searches, find word definitions, and create their own power points to show their teachers the tools and accommodations they need when they do an in-service for their teachers as part of their self-advocacy IEP goal. Its such an impressive tool with more apps designed especially for the visually impaired, and I would not be able to provide them to my students without the BVIS fund.

I don't want to leave out my multi-handicapped students, and although their educational programs are different than their general education peers, their needs are just as important. The BVIS fund has provided ipads for their use also, and I saw my deaf/blind student use her hand and finger to activate an app on the iPad, with a very purposeful and intentional movement to create visual effects (she has some vision, but very little hearing). She is beginning to use the iPad to make choices using pictures of real objects/places on the ipad, and its very exciting to see her communication options open up with the ipad. Some of my students find the visual apps on the iPad engaging and an opportunity to interact with staff with choice making, and some of my students find the auditory apps engaging. Its a tool with potential to discover more ways to increase their engagement, make choices, communicate, and interact with their school environment. The BVIS fund also provided a variety of switch activated toys/activities for them, giving them sensory experiences, a variety of cause and effect opportunities, and expanding opportunities to participate in their program. The ipads and the switch toys would not have been possible without the BVIS fund.

I have a middle school student that just competed in the state wide goalball tournament in Canby. He had the opportunity to connect with other students from around the state who also have visual impairments, have fun with them, be a part of the goalball team, and experience the excitement and enjoyment of competing. The support of the Canby school district is integral to the success of the yearly tournament, and the entire school gets behind the tournament by hosting it, providing team refreshments, and helping to run and staff the event, as well as watch the competition as spectators. The middle schoolers in Canby are outstanding in their interest and support of my students with visual impairments, and everyone feels accomplishment and pride from their efforts. They also host our annual state track meet, and make the track and field event an exciting and fun occasion for my students. The goalball tournament, the track meet, and also the paralympic event are 3 statewide opportunities for my students made possible by the BVIS fund. Our own goalball practices leading up to the state tournament are also funded by the BVIS fund. And we have a family fun night for our students and their siblings and parents with a big turnout that is funded by the BVIS fund.

As a teaching professional, its important that I learn about new technology, new resources, new ideas to meet the constantly changing needs of my students, especially since one size does not fit all, and what works for one student at that district at that time may not work for a different student in a different district under different circumstances. Last July I attended a National AER conference that I would not have been able to attend without the BVIS fund. It gave me the professional development opportunities to hear speakers, learn of new research, try out new technologies and devices, and share experiences to gather ideas. I have also benefited from the iPad and other technology training that the BVIS fund has provided to me in their statewide training.

I am so grateful to the BVIS fund for the tools, equipment, and opportunities they have provided for my students. I hope to see a continuation of the funding to support my students.

With my experience of the tremendous benefits my students have been receiving due to the BVIS funding, I have some concerns about the proposed changes:

- I would not like to see the funding that was designed to enhance and improve services for those special education students diverted to vision screening for students who are not special education students. The reason my students are in special education is because they have eye diseases and conditions that are not corrected with glasses and they require accommodations, special tools, and special instruction to learn how to use those tools and equipment. They qualify for services under the visual impairment eligibility because without those things, they can't access their textbooks, handouts, curriculum or classroom instruction. General vision screening will find students that need glasses, but their acuities are easily corrected by glasses and they do not have an eye condition or disease that qualifies them for vision services. The districts I work in already have vision screening and do not need additional support. My students have the kind of eye diseases and conditions that are diagnosed very early, as infants. Because the BVIS fund was designed to improve services for students with a vision eligibility, vision screening for students who do not qualify for special education vision eligibility as determined by the OARS, would be an inappropriate use of the funds. Our current Low Vision Clinic by Dr. Lowery of Pacific University, for our visually impaired students, is a valuable resource for my students and their families, and is a more appropriate use of BVIS funds.

- I have been very pleased with the educational impact the BVIS fund has had on my students, and would encourage you to continue the fund with the management and distribution of funds in its current position. I don't think an advisory committee as stated in the bill would have the experience in the educational field to adequately assess and provide for the needs of visually impaired students. I think that expertise comes best from the IEP team, including the parents.

Thank you for your time, and thank you so much for the technology, equipment, and support that my students have received.

Sincerely,

Sue Schimmelfennig
Teacher of the Visually Impaired
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