

March 3, 2013

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter in regards to HB2755. As a former employee of the Oregon School for the Blind (OSB) and current employee of a regional program, I do not support the amended areas proposed in this bill, specifically, Section 3 (f) (page 2, line 10 "providing vision screening in the public schools of this state."

The Blind and Visually Impaired Student Fund (BVIS) was established to assist students who are identified as blind or visually impaired. Using funds designated for a population of students which statistically makes up less than one percent of students in public school to pay for vision screenings for all public school students in the state does not make financial sense. The closure of OSB was a devastating event. In my opinion, the only benefit that came from closing the school was the creation of the BVIS fund.

I cannot speak to how the BVIS fund was utilized during the 2009-2010 school year as I was unemployed. I can, however, convey to you how the BVIS fund has had an impact on the students on my caseload and me professionally since I began working for a regional program in the fall of 2010 as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired(TVI) and Orientation and Mobility(O&M) specialist. When I began working as an itinerant I immediately noticed the daily lack of opportunities for students with visual impairments to access areas of the expanded core curriculum. This was shocking to me after coming from OSB where the nine areas of the expanded core curriculum were intertwined from the time the student woke-up to the time they went to bed at night. Students had opportunities to learn and practice new skills daily at times when they would naturally occur. For example; personal hygiene, meal preparation, using a telephone or participating in a sporting event.

Students who are blind or visually impaired do not develop concepts and skills incidentally like their sighted peers. They need exposure to concrete experiences, instruction and extra time to explore and practice before they understand the concept or master the skill. Because of the BVIS fund, my students have had the following expanded core curriculum opportunities:

- Participated with other visually impaired peers from around the state at "Paralympics" where they received instruction in goal ball, judo, tandem biking and beep baseball. (*Recreation and Leisure; Self-Advocacy; Orientation and Mobility; Visual Efficiency; Social Interaction Skills*)
- Participated in bi-monthly goal ball practice in their local community, and then at the state goal ball tournament. (*Recreation and Leisure; Self-Advocacy; Orientation and Mobility; Visual Efficiency; Social Interaction Skills*)
- Participated with other visually impaired peers from around the state at the spring track meet. (*Recreation and Leisure; Self-Advocacy; Orientation and Mobility; Visual Efficiency; Social Interaction Skills*)
- Students who are visually impaired, but not blind, received iPads with their textbooks downloaded in lieu of having multiple volumes of large print books. By using the iPad the student has the ability to adjust the font size, text size and have the book read to them if needed when eye fatigue is a factor. (*Compensatory; Self-Advocacy; Assistive Technology; Visual Efficiency*)
- Gone bowling with other visually impaired students in their region. (*Recreation and Leisure; Self-Advocacy; Orientation and Mobility; Visual Efficiency; Social Interaction Skills*)
- In the summer, elementary age students have been able to participate in a week long day camp which included making their own lunch daily, swimming lessons, therapeutic horseback riding, socializing with peers, picking vegetables at a community garden and making homemade pizzas in an outdoor stone oven. (*Recreation and Leisure; Independent Living skills; Self-Advocacy; Orientation and Mobility; Visual Efficiency; Social Interaction Skills*)
- Also in the summer, middle and high school students went on a 3-day, 2-night camping trip where they had to pitch their own tent, went hiking, fishing, rowed a boat on a lake and had to work

together to prepare their meals. (*Recreation and Leisure; Independent Living skills; Self-Advocacy; Orientation and Mobility; Visual Efficiency; Social Interaction Skills*)

- One of my O&M students participated on the girls state goalball team which traveled to Florida for goalball youth national tournament where the Oregon girls team took second place. (*Recreation and Leisure; Independent Living skills; Self-Advocacy; Orientation and Mobility; Visual Efficiency; Social Interaction Skills*)

The BVIS fund has paid for professional development trainings and equipment for staff and student use. Most recently my regional program was able to purchase a tactile graphics embosser which will allow us to produce our own tactile graphics for students. Now students in our region have access to tactile graphics at the same time their peers are receiving the information visually. By having access to tactile graphics at an earlier age our students will be better prepared for when they take OAKS for the first time as third graders.

The activities I have mentioned above have a lasting impact on the students in our region. I have a first grader on my caseload who is totally blind who I have served for almost two years. For a recent class writing assignment students had to write "All About..." My student choose me as her topic. When I returned to her class a few days later she had wrote "All About Mrs. Orton". In her five sentences she wrote about how I help her carry the ball when we go bowling, how I go swimming with her in the summer and how when she rode the horse Elska, Mrs. Orton was there to watch. I am with this young lady four days a week. Not once did she mention anything about how I teach her braille, math, orientation and mobility or anything related to school activities. Everything she mentioned happened at an activity where BVIS funds were involved. I have had similar experiences with other students on my caseload, specifically the elementary age students. A classroom teacher asked me when we were going to do another after-school activity. It had been a month since we went bowling and that was all her second grade low vision student had written about. She said she was getting tired of reading about bowling and finally had to have him switch to a different topic.

Thank-you for your time.

Sincerely,

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