

March 6, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a teacher of the visually impaired (VI) at NW Regional ESD. I am concerned about HB 2755, regarding the BVIS fund, that is now being considered by the legislature. As a vision teacher, I see daily how this fund serves the students I work with in a way that far surpasses what was available to them in the past. They have state of the art equipment that makes the same materials accessible to them in classroom, that are given to their normally sighted peers. They are given opportunities to participate in sports events, at a competitive level, with other visually impaired students around the state

The BVIS fund has purchased equipment for VI students to replace the sometimes antiquated equipment that they used in the past. Students can now access their textbooks on an iPad instead of carrying bulky, heavy, multi-volume large print textbooks from class to class. They use a camera system that can be pointed toward the board to bring distance materials to a monitor placed on their desks. The same camera helps them access near vision materials on their desk. Students have electronic magnifiers that make all print accessible to them. Scanners are provided to students to enable them to scan worksheets, handouts and tests into their computer where they can complete the assignment and email it to their teachers. All of these options are available to VI students, where before BVIS, there was not enough equipment to go around.

Participating in sporting events is often difficult for VI students. Since the BVIS fund was created, there has been a new excitement and competitive level present at the state's annual goalball tournament (goalball is a sport developed for the VI and blind). The students who choose to participate really grow during the experience. I was one of the coaches this year for our region and some of my students were on the team. I witnessed firsthand how they stepped up to the challenge of being part of a team. They had pride in their level of accomplishment and were determined to try harder when they made mistakes. Many of these students feel alone and isolated in their school because they are the only VI student and they find it hard to make friends. They blossom during the goalball season when they practice together and new friendships are formed.

It has been very helpful to have the BVIS fund available to fund purchases/activities in these, and other areas for our students. It has also been useful to have the fund administered by someone with a vision background who is a teacher of the VI. He knows what these students need and works well with the Dept. of Education to advocate for students and educate others about their needs.

Laura Fiasca

Teacher of the Visually Impaired

NW Regional ESD

lfiasca@nwresd.k12.or.us