

Testimony in support of:
Higher Education Funding for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Submitted by:
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September 17, 2020

Dear Senator Michael Dembrow (Chair), and members of the Interim Committee on Education,

My name is Jamie Burch. I work with NW Disability Support (NWDS) in Portland, Oregon. I am writing to submit this email as testimony to the Senate Interim Committee on Education Meeting on September 21, 2020, on behalf of NW Disability Support.

This testimony is a contribution to the Equity in Education meeting discussions. People with disabilities are an underrepresented group and the equity of their education needs to be elevated and included in equity discussions. Today we would like to include disability and intersectionality in the equity conversation.

The issue is that all funded educational efforts in Oregon are not required to plan for the inclusion of students with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD). How is that equitable? Students with disabilities are disproportionately isolated and restrained in Oregon schools? How is that equitable? The majority of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Oregon spend 80% or more of their day segregated at school. How is that equitable? Students with disabilities can't access Oregon Promise. How is that equitable? And finally, students with disabilities don't have the right to go to college in Oregon. How is that equitable?

Since 2006, we have been bringing parents and educators across Oregon together at the All Born (in) conference. We provide participants with tools to create inclusive educational opportunities for students from early learning age through higher education. The conference is designed to meet the needs of parents and professionals advocating for and dedicated to inclusive education.

In 2013, teenagers with intellectual disabilities told us they want to go to college. However, college entry requirements in Oregon prevent them from becoming students and there was no higher education program for students with ID in Oregon. By 2015, NW Disability worked to build a strong coalition of parents, professionals, colleges, and agencies from across the state, formed the Think College Inclusion Oregon Coalition (TCIOC), and supported Portland State University (PSU) in receiving a federal grant award to create Oregon's first inclusive university program for students with intellectual disabilities. PSU has applied for its second round of TPSID funding, but if they

are not awarded a grant then Oregon will again have no higher education option for students with intellectual disabilities. This is an equity issue.

Before COVID, our organization was in conversations with Candace Pelt, Oregon Department of Education, and Ben Cannon, Higher Education Coordinating Commission in regard to higher education for students with intellectual disabilities. We are grateful for their interest and our shared goal of opening doors to college for students with ID. We look forward to continuing those conversations as inclusive post-secondary opportunities should be available to any student in Oregon who has a dream to go to college.

College for all is important to everyone if we are looking through an equity lens. This is why legislators should support laying a path for higher education investments for students with intellectual disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities need increased access to inclusive higher education opportunities through Oregon Department of Education transition programs, Oregon Promise, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, Vocational Rehabilitation, Oregon Developmental Disabilities Services, and other sources of state funding. When considering equitable education please consider planning for the inclusion of people with intellectual/developmental disabilities and the funding to include them.

Educational segregation is a contributing factor to the dismal employment rate of only 17% of adults with developmental disabilities in the general population having a paid job. What we strive for is that with inclusion 65% of adults with disabilities who complete a Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) program have a paid job. NW Disability Support is Oregon's federally funded Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC) and we can provide you with data and resources to support the inclusion of students with disabilities across their educational career. We know that everyone benefits when students with disabilities are included in education Please consider us as your resource for educational inclusion. Thank you for taking the time to consider the information provided in this testimony.

Sincerely,

NW Disability Support



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