



# COLUMBIA REGIONAL PROGRAM

*Our Services: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Blind/Visually Impaired,  
Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Deafblind, Orthopedic Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury*

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**March 31, 2021**

Dear Chairs Frederick and McLain, Members of the Committee:

I am here on behalf of REGIONAL INCLUSIVE SERVICES formally known as Regional Programs. We provide essential education and related services for children with specialized, high needs disabilities to allow inclusion in their neighborhood schools and communities across Oregon.

## **Legislative Request:**

- **Additional funding of \$10 million from the general fund for the 2021-23 biennium to restore service levels reduced since 2009.**
- **Passage of SB 53 to examine Regional Inclusive Services and long-term adequate funding.**
- **To achieve adequate service levels we estimate a need of an additional \$50 million in general fund dollars.**

## **Through Regional Inclusive Services serves (Birth to 21) we serve:**

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Blind and Visually Impaired
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- DeafBlindness
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury

## **Regional Inclusive Services ensures the above students have access to their right to an education, extracurriculars and independence:**

- Oregon's students who are Blind or Visually Impaired receive Braille instruction, visual concepts and tools to access general education curriculum.
- Educators serving students with Autism Spectrum Disorder receive highly specialized professional development to support students with complex needs often requiring behavioral intervention.
- Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing receive instruction in American Sign Language, literacy concepts and skills needed to participate in general education classrooms.
- Students experiencing Traumatic Brain Injury receive coordinated care from members of the Statewide TBI team.
- Students with severe Orthopedic Impairments are able to access critical, high-cost equipment tailored to their specific needs.

- Specialized Speech & Language Specialists providing instruction and access for communication such as eye gaze devices and educational/medical switches.
- Students who are Deafblind receive specialized instruction, accommodations, and modifications, supported by experts knowledgeable about their unique needs.

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#### **Advantage:**

- Assembling regional teams with deep levels of expertise and specialized licensure, ensures Oregon students receive critical services despite national shortages of trained personnel.
- Creating an economy of scale to serve students with the most complex needs in Oregon in their neighborhood schools - regardless of size or location of district.
- Assuring quality and continuity of service for Oregon's most complex and critically impacted children.

#### **Quality Education Model Report**

##### [Quality Education Model Report](#)

- Regional Programs are discussed on pages 22-23.
- "When adjusted for inflation, per student funding fell by more than 33 percent." (p. 22)

#### **2019-21 Staffing/Students Served:**

- Approximately 11,500 students (birth-age 21)
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder - 8400
  - Blind/Vision Impaired - 900
  - Deafblind - 150
  - Deaf or Hard of Hearing - 1700
  - Orthopedic Impaired - 1600
  - Traumatic Brain Injured - 250
- More than half of students have multiple regional eligibilities
- Majority of services cannot be provided by local school districts.
- Most recent census count we serve over 12,000 children, students, and families across Oregon.

#### **Impact of Funding Shortfalls**

As a result of chronic funding shortfalls, Statewide Regional Programs have reduced staff by 10% (26 FTE) from 2018-19 to 2019-20 while serving 9% more students. This has resulted in reduced services to students in critical need. Increased costs alongside continued student growth resulted in additional service reductions in 2019-21.

Service reductions resulted in children sitting in classrooms without hearing aids; children who need Braille to learn not receiving materials; children not receiving specialized equipment for orthopedic impairment; children not receiving adequate services from Speech Language Pathologists and classroom teachers not receiving adequate training and support from Specialists to mitigate severe behaviors of children on the Autism Spectrum.

The GRB presents another biennium of program reductions for the students who require the most significant and complex services in Oregon.

### Family Testimonials:

- “One day, after driving hours in the yucky weather and seeing dozens of kids along the way, one of Tyson's service providers, Ruth, made one last stop at our home. We tried several sites on the wheelchair over the years to put a communication switch in a location for Tyson to access and use a 'Talking Device". On this particular day, she asked Tyson if he wanted to try his knee, he said "Yes" with a long blink, she explained to him he would have to move his knee to activate it, he did! And now he uses the knee switch often. We made it a conversation button, he would ask questions, tell jokes and play music for people. For the first time ever...he was able to have "conversations" with all kinds of people. We recorded his favorite song on there to motivate him to use it often. In the summer of 2017, he attended a musical concert to see Michael Franti, he "talked" with Michael using his switch and Franti thought it was the coolest thing ever. He invited Tyson to come up on stage and start the song for him. Franti introduced him to the crowd and talked about his form of communication, and let me tell you, the whole crowd of thousands of people heard his song, his voice, his special way of communicating.”

“That was the moment the life of my son had many possibilities open up, because he was heard. Imagine the feeling of “being heard” when for over a decade you had not been. I speak on His behalf, on the behalf of the hundreds of students I have taught over the years and for all the Children who need and rely on these services. Please fund them properly. “

- “Regional Services have been life changing for my family. Their highly skilled team provides services to my kids that helped them learn how to talk and hear, something I never thought possible. Both of my children have profound hearing loss and when we moved to Oregon several years ago, they could only communicate with sign language. They had never worn hearing aids that worked for them. I had given up hope on verbal communication. The staff fit them with a different brand of hearing aids and suddenly my kids were listening and starting to talk. Regional Services also established a deaf and hard of hearing program in many area schools that have specialists onsite to help the kids with everything ranging from academics to hearing assistive technology. One of the best parts is there are many other kids that go to school at these center schools who also wear hearing aids or have cochlear implants. There are so many options for my kids that I would have not known existed without guidance from Regional Programs. Both of my kids are both getting a high-quality education and thriving. I can sing my youngest to sleep at night, hear my older child tell a funny joke, and we all can read aloud together. I am deeply grateful and do not believe we could have arrived at this point without Regional Services.” - ~Alexandra

- “Almost 3 years ago, we adopted our daughter from Haiti. She is completely blind. She had little knowledge of navigating around with a cane and had not yet learned how to read Braille. Shortly after she came home, we began services with Regional Services. She has been receiving services from Regionals for over two years and they have helped her to learn to read and write Braille, as well as how to use her orientation and mobility skills. These services have been absolutely instrumental in helping our daughter to not only learn, but to thrive. They have given her the ability to become an independent reader just like her older siblings. She has not only been given the skills to navigate the world safely, but they have also taken the time to teach our family how to assist her. We know many of the regional specialists and each one of them have been so wonderful to our family and have provided us with so many helpful resources. We couldn’t imagine navigating all of this without them. We’re so thankful for everything they have done for our daughter through the services that they provide.” ~Mallory
  
- “Regional Services have had a tremendous impact on the quality of education and resources my child receives. The program guided us through every step of the services process and allowed our daughter to receive proper education, and audiology services and speech therapy. The entire staff from the counselors, the deaf educators, the speech- language therapists, and audiologists have become our village of support allowing our daughter to make great strides and avoid falling behind academically, socially and vocally while keeping up with her technology needs. We know for a fact the resources Regionals provides are of tremendous assistance to families with special needs children. We have met and connected with many other families who have also benefited from these important programs.” ~Ana