

Chair and members of the committee, my name is Lindsay Alexander and I live in Multnomah County. I am the mom of a 7 1/2 year old son named Champ. Before I talk about his journey I would like to share something I recently learned that hits close to home and has really taken me back. National research concludes preschool has the highest suspension and expulsion rates of any age and black, native and disabled children are disproportionately impacted. Let's let that sink in... Before some kids are even entering kindergarten they have already been suspended! Does anyone think having kids stay home from school for an extra day of cartoons is going to teach three, four and five-year-olds NOT to repeat a behavior?? Think of the relationship preschool suspension starts with the family and the label these kids bring with them before even starting school. I had no idea could kids could get suspended before kindergarten. We are setting these kids up for failure before they even start elementary school!! To think, if my son would have been suspended in pre-K instead of receiving behavior coaching his story would be completely different! But my son is one of the lucky ones, the services and where he received them in his preschool years helped our family have the tools we needed for him to become a happy, loving, thriving second grader in a GEN Ed classroom with some of the same kiddos he's been classmates with since pre-K. Champ was born with a cleft palate then came; feeding tubes, surgeries, ear tubes, sleep studies, many specialist, ADHD, severe nonverbal autism and apraxia. To say I have been advocating for him since the day he was born would be a pretty true statement. The first half of his life was rough. I spent many late nights researching and many weekends at advocating workshops. I learned more and more about what my son was going through and what I needed to advocate for. I can't tell you how many times I was told the squeaky wheeled parent gets the most services for their kid. My son was receiving private ABA and speech services as well as early intervention in-home visits but he really needed the social interaction so I started squeaking and so did his in-home team and a few months later he entered the local Leap program pre-K where he finished up the second half of the school year and did the full school year the next. This decision would be the best thing we could have done for him!! When he entered the pre-K he had very little communication, only a few words or signs. He had good days and rough days but no matter what, from day one he was part of the class and included. I looked over a few of the behavior reports from back then and let's just say if my son had been enrolled in a different program he easily would have been one of the kids to get suspended. But he wasn't suspended because Multnomah County early childhood special ed classrooms don't suspend or expelled children. Instead of suspension they develop a behavior support plan and did family coaching. The goal was always inclusion! Nothing has changed his life or set him up for success the way his pre-K did. He never could have entered kindergarten and flourished the way he has if it wasn't for the Leap pre-K program and all the hard work put in by that team. It takes a village and my sons village he had early on set him up to flourish and be successful for the rest of his life. These young kids can't advocate for themselves and most of the parents don't know how or even that they need to advocate. Please provide the funding needed to ensure all classrooms, teachers and parents in Oregon have the resources, coaching and support needed to ensure every child and family regardless of race, disability, no matter where they live or where they attend school get equal opportunity to thrive, learn and be included in their classrooms and schools without fear of being suspended. Every classroom in Oregon should be fully inclusive with fully trained staff just like my son received! Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive and be included and the earliest years are the most important! Every child could be a CHAMP if given the right tools and coaching from the beginning!!

Thank you,  
Lindsay Alexander