



March 27, 2023

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, and members of the Committee:

As the Chief of Student Support Services at Oregon's largest school district, I write in strong support of House Bill 2895. The 11% cap on state funding for special education services is something few other states do, and it feeds inequitable outcomes for both students and districts. It leaves all of us – but especially smaller districts – with an impossible choice: meet all students' needs with the funds you have, or arbitrarily prioritize a subset of students.

Oregon should stand out among the states for bold policy that equitably serves ***all*** students who qualify for special education services. Instead, by capping state funds, we're operating as very few other states do. Most states don't cap funds because it leaves districts on their own to make up the difference. In denser areas, this means inequalities (and competition) between neighboring districts that can spur cross-district transfers. In less dense areas, if a district has over the 11% cap, students are left with no clear alternative.

Even the current cap – 11% – is arbitrarily low. US Department of Education data shows 15% of students nationally were identified for special education services as of 2020-2021. In Oregon, 2020–2021 suggests the percentage is less than the national – 14% – but still 27% above the state's current cap. That means our current approach is ***failing the needs and the educational experience of over 16,500 students with disabilities***. Estimates of this year's enrollment suggest that over 20,000 students with disabilities are not fully funded due to specific local districts exceeding the 11% limit.

As a public school system, we must build a funding structure that reflects our values, best practices, and simple logic. The current cap is inequitable, uncommon, and failing students. System changes like those in HB 2895 will go a long way to tell Oregon's students that we value them all, regardless of their need for special education services.

On behalf of PPS, I strongly support the passage of House Bill 2895.

Sincerely,

Jey Buno
Chief of Student Support Services
Portland Public Schools