

Chair Neron and members of the House Committee on Education, my name is Kernan Willis, I live in Portland, OR and I am an educator in support of HB 4079. For 11 years I have been a special education teacher, working both in focus classrooms with students with significant communication, academic and behavioral needs and in a learning center with students with a range of disabilities-academic, physical, behavioral, emotional and cognitive. For the 11 years I have taught, not one year have I been able to meet my students' legal minutes for specially designed instruction and supports due to insufficient staffing-insufficient staffing due to inadequate funding from the district and in the state. What this looks like is students in my focus classroom being isolated in their room as we did not have enough staff to support them in their general education classrooms. This goes against their legal right to be provided a Fair and Appropriate Education under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act. This looks like 5th graders reading at a kindergarten and first grade level who should be provided reading instruction daily only receiving 2 days, 3 if they're lucky. That looks like me not being able to teach the district purchased special education reading curriculum with fidelity as it requires 3-5 days a week at 45 minutes to an hour each session. Instead, I can do 2, 30 minute sessions and progression of students through this program is painfully slow. This looks like intervention groups that should have 2-3 students in them with 7-8 students, more than double the recommended amount-students with ADHD, dyslexia, sensory processing disorders, autism, social skills deficits and school skills deficits trying their best to focus for 30 minutes in a group that should meet their needs but doesn't. Insufficient staffing means students are not supported in the general education classroom with additional adult support to meet their interventions with fidelity, and help them build their independence and carry their skills from the special education setting to the general education setting. This looks like students being given an online math program or handwriting book to work on on their own instead of quality instruction from a certified adult because there isn't enough time in the day to support them. Insufficient staffing means when a student is in a high stress situation and needing adult support to regulate themselves and stay safe-all other academic and social groups are canceled so I can provide this support until that student is regulated and able to return to class which can take up to 2 hours some days depending on the child and situation. With an 11% cap on special education funding we are punishing students for having a disability and actively going against federal special education law.

Every student deserves to receive the resources they need to succeed. The 11% cap on SPED weights is an arbitrary cap that does damage to our kids, and pits those who need support the most against one another. Please vote yes on HB 4079, and ensure it receives the funding it needs so our special education programs can receive the funding it needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.