

I am writing to voice my strong support for House Bill 2953, which removes the special education funding cap. My son is a sophomore at McDaniel High School in Portland. He experiences Down syndrome and receives special education services.

As you are all aware, the funding cap was set at 11% and has remained unchanged since 1991. In contrast, the actual average across the state is 14.8%, with some districts reaching as high as 18%. In my district, Portland Public Schools, the percentage is 16.8%. What that means is districts are making do with less than they truly need. Schools are simply not adequately staffed to support their highest needs students.

That's what it looks like on paper. I hope I can convey in some small way what this looks like to students and their families. It looks like being pushed out of our neighborhood schools because it is not possible to fully staff all the schools in our district with a continuum of services for special education. It looks like getting a call at work to come pick up our kid early because there is no adult to be with them to keep them safe. It looks like escalation of behaviors that impact the entire school climate and exacerbate ableist assumptions about people with disabilities. Behaviors that would be managed in an adequately staffed school. It looks like a student placed in an environment that is more restrictive than they need, not because that's best for their education, but because it is cheaper to group children with disabilities together. It looks like a child sitting in the back of a classroom confused and anxious because he doesn't understand the lesson because the special education teacher did not have the capacity to adapt the lesson that week.

You will say the money isn't there. Yet there are always tradeoffs. What tradeoffs are you willing to make to continue underserving our highest-need students? And why is this acceptable? Right now, students, families, and the workforce in our public schools are carrying this burden. I am asking you to lift the burden from us a bit.

At a time when the Department of Education itself is in jeopardy, it is more critical than ever for states to step up. Raising and fully funding the special education cap isn't just a policy decision—it's a commitment to our students, a recognition of their worth, and a statement to voters that our legislators are standing with us. This bill will make a real, measurable difference in the lives of Oregon students. Please choose to invest in them.

Finally, I want to be clear: funding for special education should not come at the expense of general education. The legislature must fully fund education in Oregon, as recommended by the Quality Education Model, while also fully funding special education. Anything less would only deepen existing inequities and create unnecessary divisions within our communities. Fully funding special education benefits *all* students—not just those with identified disabilities. I urge you to make this investment in Oregon's future. Thank you.