

February 18, 2025

Chair Neron, Vice Chair Dobson, Vice Chair McIntire, and Members of the House Education Committee:

The Oregon School Psychologist Association (OSPA) is writing in support of HB 2953 which funds critical services for students with disabilities by raising Oregon's cap on special education funding for districts. Oregon is among a small number of states that limits funding for special education services through a flat cap which limits schools' abilities to meet students' needs.

Students with disabilities in Oregon are currently underserved and experience inequities in academic outcomes, graduation, and discipline. Inadequate funding and special education staffing contribute to a lack of access to high-quality services and exacerbate inequities for students with disabilities. OSPA supports fully funding special education services to promote equitable outcomes for students with disabilities.

OSPA also supports creating workload standards for special educators, including school psychologists. These standards are essential in ensuring access to high-quality services including evidence-based mental health services. School psychologists are [uniquely qualified](#) school-based mental health professionals who serve the entire school community and also have unique training in serving students with disabilities. Students are [six times more likely to access mental health services when offered in schools](#) and [youth from racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds are more likely to receive services at school](#).

Oregon has the highest rate in the Nation of youth reporting serious thoughts of suicide, with 15% of Oregon's youth between the ages of 12-17 reporting serious thoughts of suicide and 25% reporting at least one major depressive episode in the past year. Students with disabilities experience higher rates of [mental health needs](#) including [suicide](#) risk. A critical factor contributing to the lack of youth mental health services, in particular for students with disabilities, is Oregon's significant shortage of school psychologists. School psychologist shortages significantly limit the availability of high-quality and comprehensive services to students, caregivers, and schools. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends that school psychologist-to-student ratios not exceed 1:500. School psychologist's average current ratios in Oregon are [1:1,279](#). Many Oregon districts and Educational Service Districts are serving students with ratios more than 10 times NASP's recommendation or over 5,000 students per school psychologist.

We must prioritize funding for evidence-based services for students with disabilities and for addressing youth depression, anxiety, and suicide by increasing youths' access to school psychologists. Oregon's school psychologist shortages are not inevitable and can be addressed through targeted investments including an Oregon Tuition Service Obligation Grant and support for expanding school psychologist training programs in Oregon. OSPA requests that Oregon adopt NASP's 1:500 school psychologist to student ratio workload standard for school psychologists and implement targeted investments to support districts in meeting these ratios. Oregon's youth, including youth with disabilities, deserve this investment.

Targeted Investments to Increase Student's Access to Evidence-Based Special Education & Mental Health Services:

- Dedicating School-Based Mental Health Medicaid funds to increase the number of school psychologists including "grow your own" tuition reimbursement programs to diversify the workforce and meet recommended school psychologist ratios and workload standards.
- Creating an [Oregon Tuition Service Obligation Grant](#) for school psychologists serving high-needs school districts in Oregon to increase student access to mental health services, address shortages, and diversify the workforce.
- Provide funding to increase school psychologist training programs and program capacity including investing in hybrid programs to address shortages of school psychologists in rural areas ([NASP State Model Legislation](#)).
- Including school psychologist National recommended ratios in Oregon's Quality Education Model (QEM) and education funding methodology.