

February 18, 2025

Dear Representatives,

My name is Kelsey Proctor, and I have been a nationally board certified teacher for more than a decade. I am providing written commentary in support of HB2953.

I am writing to express my deepest belief about special education funding and it is this: special education funding IS general education funding. They are two sides of the same coin. If you cut one, or underfund one, you are simultaneously cutting and underfunding the other. Always. Every time. Without exception.

One of the principal tenets of special education is FAPE—the idea that a free, appropriate, public education should be a right for students with disabilities. Without funding, students with disabilities do not have dedicated spaces for them to feel safe, thrive, and grow into the wonderful adults they are capable of becoming. Before IDEA was passed in 1975, these students were mercilessly excluded. They were put in a broom closet, or told to stay home altogether. It was wrong. But it was also a societal acknowledgement that the regular classroom was not an appropriate place for the child with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Yesterday, I came to the state capital to lobby for additional funding for special education. All of the representatives and staffers I spoke with were gracious and supportive of what I had to say, and I am grateful. Yet one of my colleagues, another teacher, spoke with a different representative who expressed some frustration. The representative commented on how far we have come; why aren't teachers satisfied with the amazing expansion of rights that legislators have advocated for already? When will enough be enough?

I thought about this all night. Then I went and taught all day, and late tonight after my own children are in bed, it is still on my mind. I am wondering if legislators truly understand how today, with IDEA in place but unfunded, we have actually somehow gone backwards. My classroom, as a general classroom teacher teaching high school, is still as inappropriate a place for a student who reads at the second or third grade level as it would have been in 1974. The academic demands are too high. They cause anxiety, shame, embarrassment, and a persistent sense of failure for the student pursuing a modified diploma. In 1974, they would have never been put in my classroom. But today, with nowhere else for the student to go, they are in my classroom nonetheless. I am not a novelty or a rarity. In every district, in every county of the state you can walk into any school and find a teacher in less than 20 minutes with a child in her classroom that is in an inappropriate placement.

Inappropriate placements cause extreme harm, and even trauma, to the student with a disability. I care deeply about this; please see my testimony for HB2448 to read the results of a survey I conducted with 90 Portland-metro SPED area families to gain an understanding of the neglect and civil rights violations occurring.

But inappropriate placements also cause harm to regular education students. These harms are cumulative in impact and important. They cause real loss to overall real learning. Let's look at three common scenarios together.

Let's begin with an elementary student with a speech delay who is very frustrated. How might he attempt to communicate? He might scream, or throw a chair at his teacher in desperation. What does this do to his peer, the regular education student sitting right next to him? When room clears become regular occurrences, regular education students become confused at best (is throwing and screaming okay for everyone?) and traumatized at worst. Regular education students become fearful. They too lose their spark; start wanting not to attend class.

What about a middle school student who deserves a 1:1 aide? What might he do when put into a regular education classroom? Hopefully he would access the IA for support if he felt overwhelmed. But what if there is only one IA, who is assigned to push-in to three different classrooms around the school during that period? Might he attempt to leave school and elope? He might! What should the teacher choose when she is the only adult in the classroom. Choice 1 is to let the student run and possibly leave the building. Choice 2 is to interrupt her science lesson and leave 27 other sixth-graders unattended with chemicals out in the middle of a lab. Choice 3 is to stop doing labs at all with that entire class for the remainder of the year to never be in this position again.

What about a high school student with a second grade reading level? We have a lot of those in Oregon. Where should they attend class? Many districts insist on "full inclusion." What they don't say is they have adopted this policy solely because they don't have enough money to staff special education classrooms. With no hope of ever accessing the curriculum, is it any wonder these amazing, deserving young people will look at their options and choose to put their head down on the desk and sleep through class or go vape in the bathroom? What should that social studies teacher do? Option 1 is to spend ten minutes with just one student to the detriment of 11 other regular education students who will not get their questions answered. Option 2 is to do nothing, sending the message to all the other students that it's acceptable to sleep in class or get high to cope with "boredom."

I've heard countless education conversations centered around outcomes. Results. Stakeholders of many categories—administrators, legislators, parents—all rightfully want to know, why isn't Oregon producing good academic outcomes? What baffles me is how many adults don't seem to understand the connection to special education funding. Do *you* put your trust in people you think are unsafe? Do *you* listen to directions from people who don't seem to care about the best interests of your colleagues, family, friends? I don't. I'm not surprised that children don't either. Why would they trust an adult who lets one kid throw chairs but scolds them for not staying on task? Why would they take directions from someone who let their brother or sister fail?

I want to end this perpetual misconception that we as a state can achieve outstanding academic outcomes for regular education students without fully funding special education. We cannot. We cannot because the two funding buckets are really the same bucket. Please permanently do away with any mental constructs that funding can be separate. We've done this before as a country. Say it with me: there. is. no. separate. but. equal. All children are deserving. All children deserve fully funded schools. Eroding special education funding erodes outcomes for regular education, too. It erodes societal trust in ALL authority. We as a society cannot afford that.

Sincerely,

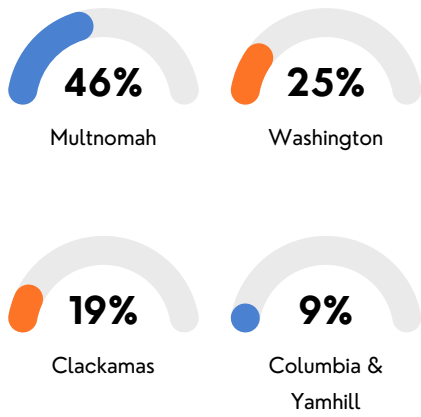
Kelsey Bickers Proctor, NBCT
Citizen of Oregon

Demographics

In 2025 I wrote, administered, and compiled results from a survey to amplify the voices of 90 mothers whose children ages 4-19 qualify for special education in 22 school districts in the greater Portland, OR area.

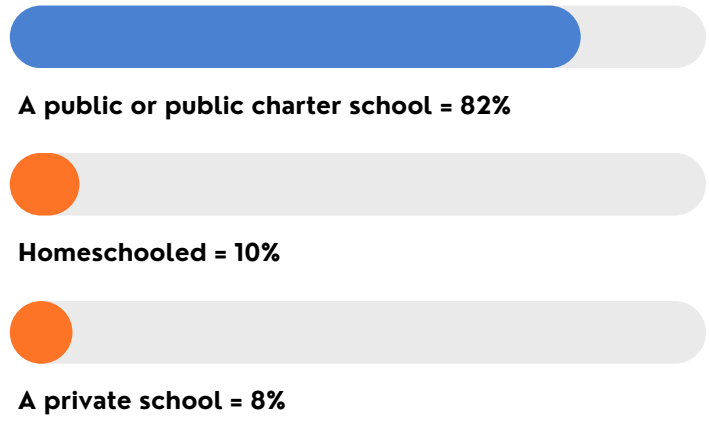
Where the Students Live

I accepted responses from Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Columbia, and Yamhill counties.



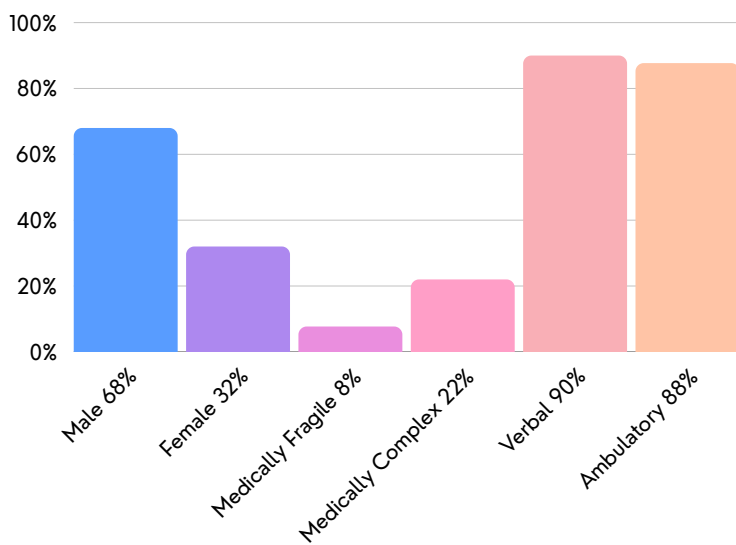
Where the Students Learn

I asked mothers where their children learn.



Student Attributes

I asked mothers about ways others might define their child.



Independence

I asked mothers whether their child needs help with survival needs.



Placements & Services

I asked mothers whether they agreed with their child's placement.

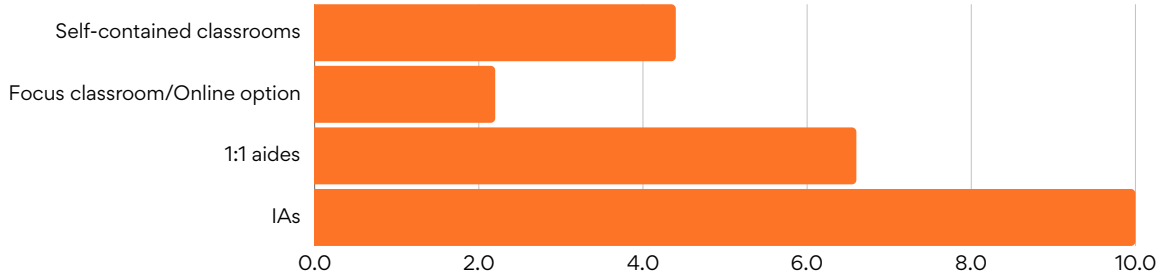
23%
said no

I asked mothers if their child had lost services they previously had despite wanting to keep them.

23%
said yes

Cut Services

I asked what services had been cut.



Where do students who lose their self-contained classrooms and focus classrooms go? They don't go home because SB819 does not allow an abbreviated day. They go into the regular classroom! If many children with IEPs are inappropriately placed, what message is being sent to **all** students about whether kids really matter and are safe at school?

10% of all mothers surveyed said their students had lost Instructional Aides (IAs). What does this mean? It means all students lose vital time with their teachers.

What the Mothers Report

Mothers who report their child's school does not have any space for emotional regulation 18%

Mothers who report the space for emotional regulation is in a public space, such as a hallway 23%

"The students are only allowed to go in it when they are in the green zone, which is pointless" -Mother of an 11 y/o

Where are students melting down? In the regular classroom

Regular education teachers do not have adequate support for inclusion to work

22% Mothers who report their child's SDI is supposed to be delivered by the regular education classroom teacher

28% Mothers who report their child has stayed stagnant or lost academic skills in the last 12 calendar months

"My son is frequently asked to leave class because of his 'disruptive behavior'" -Mother of a 13 y/o

Mothers who have received documentation their child was the impetus for a room clear 18%

Mothers who report their child has attempted to elope from school at some point in their school career 31%

"The teacher told us my child was not safe in the classroom and she couldn't make it safe for her." -Mother of a 17 y/o

Who are the other children left with when these events occur?

Do you think the other students don't notice their peers feel unsafe?

"It's a constant battle. The damage is done, and I don't know if he'll ever feel safe or comfortable in a school" -Mother of an 11 y/o

"She started to believe she was a 'bad kid.'" -Mother of a 5 y/o

"His anxiety and emotional stress were at an all-time high, and he was saying he hated himself." -Mother of a 17 y/o

Absenteeism in Oregon's 10 largest districts

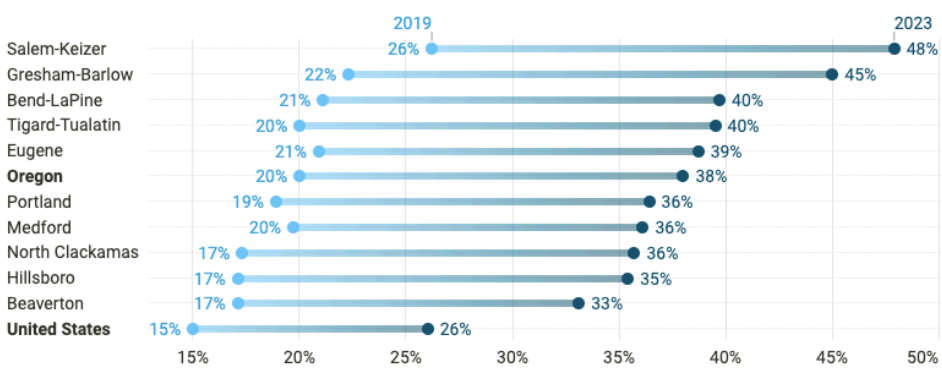


Chart: John Hill/OPB • Source: Oregon Department of Education



Would you want to go to a place every day where your peers' mistreatment is frequent, visible, and unaddressed? Do we really not understand that underfunding special education is contributing to the overall school climate and culture?

I have been a nationally board certified teacher for more than 10 years. I believe in special education and want all students to succeed! Any legislator with further questions is welcome to email me at kelsey nbct@gmail.com.