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On Behalf Of:  
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I love working in Oregon. I love the students, I love where I live, and I love our schools. But as a special education staff member, I'm writing to share a painful truth: we are failing our most vulnerable students. Not because we lack the passion or the skills, but because we lack the people.

Last year, I worked as an ILS staff member in a classroom that didn't have enough adults to manage violent behaviors and teach academics at the same time. We tried. We tried to reach every student. But when a student became dysregulated, multiple staff members had to respond. The rest of us would scramble to protect the other students. The classroom stopped. No learning was happening. This wasn't a one-time thing, it was daily. And it was heartbreaking. Because of insufficient staffing, our students aren't getting what they need. These are the kids who need more support, more attention, more time and we simply don't have the adults to provide it.

One student I support is on the autism spectrum. In elementary school, he struggled with dysregulation and occasional shutdowns. The most severe behavior in his record was flipping a desk. Because the Life Skills classroom had the most adult support, that's where he was placed for middle school despite his potential. That decision, made out of necessity rather than appropriateness, stalled his academic progress. At the beginning of this year, he was testing at a first or second grade level. This year, he's working with me, an adult who is committed to him, who often works well beyond contracted hours. And with that consistency and support, he has grown three grade levels in reading, writing, and math in just a few months. He's now testing at a 4th grade level. That kind of growth should never be the exception. It should be the norm. But it can only happen if we have the staffing to make it possible.

There are so many students like him. Students who are never taught to read, not because they can't learn, but because no one had the time to figure out how they learn. Students who grow up believing they're stupid, because no adult had the capacity to show them they're not. When we underfund special education, we don't just impact those students, we impact every student. The students who are most disruptive don't need punishment; they need support. And when they don't get it, everyone's learning is interrupted. But when they do, classrooms stabilize, and the entire student body benefits.

We are at a breaking point. Our students deserve more than survival. They deserve to thrive. But that will only happen if we fund special education fully and equitably. We need more staff. We need more hands, more hearts, and more people to believe

in these kids the way we do. Please fight for the funding we so desperately need, not just for special education students, but for the future of public education in Oregon.