

Submitter: Rachael Jones

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Education

Measure: HB2895

I am a speech-language pathologist who works in special education in Portland Public Schools. I am writing to ask the House Committee on Education to support HB2895 and lift the funding cap on special education.

Special Education is famously the area of public education with the highest rate of burnout, and for good reason. Caseloads are high, student need is high, and this has only increased in the wake of the pandemic. Our special education students are not receiving the support they need to succeed at school, and the teachers that support them are stretched thin and struggling. Even worse, when teachers burn out, they leave special education or the profession entirely, leaving positions vacant with no one credentialed to fill them. These vacancies create pressure on those who remain to serve even greater caseloads, creating a cycle of burnout that leaves special education chronically understaffed and constantly operating in emergency mode.

The hardest part of this cycle is that we lose educators who have a high degree of expertise in a very unique skillset. Special education professionals teach kids to read, write, and do math. We feed them (sometimes by hand, with advanced training to keep kids with feeding challenges from choking), help them learn to use the toilet, and change diapers. We help children learn to hold pencils, teach them to use high-tech speech devices, use voice-to-text, or transcribe for kids so they can express themselves. We help kids make friends, support their mental health, build emotional skills that will serve them for a lifetime, and advocate for these students to have a place in their schools and communities. We connect families with support in the community, help them find respite care, inclusive summer camps, and collaborate with their outside providers. We are on the ground each and every day, we spend our evenings and weekends preparing lessons and materials for our students, and then we get up in the morning and do it again. And we desperately need more funding to provide these services to our students and make sure every student has what they need to access their education at school.

Let's put an end to this cycle of underfunding and burnout by lifting the cap on special education funding. Let's give our most vulnerable students the support they need in the classroom. I am asking you to support HB2895 and lift the cap on special education funding for the sake of our wonderful students.