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\$30 Million Proposed Budget Cuts Disproportionately Harm Students with Disabilities

Speech therapy, assistive technology, and other essential services
defunded by Portland Public Schools in FY2025

Portland, Oregon—Two lead nonprofits that support Oregonians with disabilities are strongly opposing recently unveiled \$30 million dollars reductions in the FY2025 Portland Public Schools (PPS) budget that will disproportionately harm students with disabilities. FACT Oregon, the state’s Parent Training and Information Center for special education, and Disability Rights Oregon, a federally mandated watchdog organization that protects and defends the rights of people with disabilities, jointly delivered [a letter](#) last week to PPS Interim Superintendent Sandy Husk, to firmly oppose the cutbacks.

“All children have the right to free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, but the budget cuts proposed by Portland Public Schools jeopardize several resources students with disabilities need to learn alongside their peers,” says Christy Reese, Executive Director and CEO of FACT Oregon. “Oregon has a long way to go to close academic achievement gaps for students with disabilities.”

“As a former special education teacher, I’ve seen time and again how children can reach their full potential with proper tools and technologies,” says Jake Cornett, Executive Director and CEO of Disability Rights Oregon. “But I’ve also seen how quickly students without supports fall behind. Forcing families to compete for even fewer resources is a big step in the wrong direction for Portland and all school districts across the state.”

PPS PROPOSED CUTS, PROBLEMATIC OUTCOMES

Proposed cuts from the FY2025 PPS budget and their problematic outcomes include:

- **Feeding and Assistive Technology (AT) Teams**
These qualified professionals provide critical trainings to teachers and staff on feeding protocols to prevent choking and provide safe tube feeding—ensuring students with complex medical needs receive nourishment while at school—and support use of specialized communications technologies deemed essential for student success. PPS is planning to transfer team responsibilities to Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) and Occupational Therapists (OT), but:

- SLPs and OTs already have twice as many cases than their contracts provide.
 - There are no clearly outlined measures to ensure new staff are properly trained.
 - There is no guarantee that an SLP or OT will agree to extended responsibilities and hours to provide this vital service as needed.
- **Adaptive Physical Education (APE):** All students have a right to receive physical education (PE). It introduces and keeps kids involved in sports and physical activities, builds self-esteem, physical independence, and friendships, and promotes physical and mental well-being. It is also defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Adaptive PE is specially designed instruction that is provided to students whose IEP teams determine a need for that support to access physical education. Yet the way APE has been provided has led to some students without APE identified in their IEPs accessing this specially designed instruction.

- We are concerned that children who have been receiving APE as part of their regular school day may be put at a disadvantage by having the service removed before their current needs are determined.
- **Board Certified Behavior Analysts / Behavior Support Teams:** These staff members are specially trained to support students whose behavior impacts their learning, or the learning of others, and to provide a critical service to other educators and students.
- We are concerned about how directly student-facing staff will receive proper training and help to implement necessary behavior supports.

GREATER TRANSPARENCY NEEDED, EXPERT COUNSEL OFFERED

Dr. Sandy Husk's recent communication indicates that half of the needed cuts will come from the District Central Office and half from schools. However, FACT Oregon and Disability Rights Oregon raise concerns about the lack of transparency and meaningful stakeholder involvement in the budget deliberation process, particularly for families of students with disabilities.

Given the potential detrimental impact of these cuts on students and families, FACT Oregon and Disability Rights Oregon urge PPS leadership to reevaluate proposed cuts and adopt a budget which safeguards and does not compromise special education services. They call for transparent budget deliberations and meaningful engagement with stakeholders, including special education staff, students, and families.

FACT Oregon and Disability Rights Oregon stand ready to support PPS leadership through consultation and informational sessions for families, offering their expertise and resources to ensure that budget decisions prioritize the needs of students with disabilities.

BACKGROUND

[According to the 2022-23 Oregon Statewide Report Card](#), students with disabilities consistently lag their peers over the course of their education:

- By 11th grade, only 15% are proficient in English Language Arts, 11% in science, and less than 5% in math. In comparison, 46% of all 11th graders are proficient in English Language Arts, 33% in science, and 20% in math.
- Academic underperformance, coupled with disproportionately high rates of disciplinary action and chronic absenteeism, yields graduation rates for students with disabilities that are consistently 14 points below the state average.

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[FACT Oregon](#) is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to promoting disability equity and empowering families and communities to navigate and advocate for the supports and opportunities individuals with disabilities need to thrive at home, in school, and in the community. Since 2012, FACT Oregon has served as Oregon's state and federally designated Parent Training and Information Center for special education.

[Disability Rights Oregon](#) upholds the civil rights of people with disabilities to live, work and engage in the community. Serving as Oregon's federally mandated Protection & Advocacy system since 1977, the nonprofit works to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their full potential.