



POLICY BRIEF 2023-2024

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

To create an education system, and society at large, that values inclusion and belonging, we must ensure our funding structures are designed for those furthest away from educational justice. Washington continues to fail to provide adequate funding to fully fund special education programs and services.

Currently, Washington only provides funding for special education services for up to a maximum of 15% of students per district. The 15% cap is arbitrary, ignoring the reality that about 1/3 of our districts serve special education populations above 15%, and ultimately undermines the state’s constitutional requirement to cover the costs of educating all students.¹ The majority of states in our country have no cap on special education funding. Washington is one of only 9 states that caps the percentage of special education students that may receive funding.²

Additionally, 68% of WA school districts incurred financial deficits in special education programs in 2021-22, spending an average of approximately \$425 more per student than they received in funding. This shortage was subsidized by resources otherwise intended for the general population. The total amount of special education expenditures exceeded dedicated revenues by over \$460 million in 2021-22. Students with disabilities require an

PER PUPIL FUNDING MULTITPLIERS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

STATE’S CURRENT MULTITPLIERS

0.995X

Students spending less than 80% of their day in a general education setting.

1.0075X

Students spending 80% or more of their day in a general education setting.

MULTIPLIER REQUIRED TO MEET NEEDS

1.91X

average of 1.91 times the per pupil funding of students without disabilities, yet the state’s current multipliers of 1.0075 or 0.995 equate to a small fraction of the needed additional funding for students with disabilities.³

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) made a 2023-25 budget request to eliminate the cap and increase the multipliers, but the legislature only lifted the cap to 15% and did not change the multipliers. [OSPI’s recommendations](#) were in the best interests of students with disabilities but the state failed to respond. We must not rest until our students with special needs receive the resources they deserve.



WHY IS THERE A CAP?

The policy of capping the percentage of students that can receive special education funding was intended to mitigate overidentification of students with disabilities. Unfortunately, the actual effect of this policy has been an irresponsible underfunding of services these students legitimately require.

Instead of limiting funding, the state should fully fund special education services while OSPI bolsters its oversight of disproportionality data and intervenes in schools where overidentification occurs, honoring its responsibility to hold public schools accountable to ethical and best practices.



WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

- Eliminate the 15% cap **AND** increase the funding formula multipliers for special education, as OSPI recommended for the 2023-2025 budget cycle.
- Require OSPI to properly monitor data indicating potential overidentification, and increase resources for audit and intervention activities to resolve inappropriate identification of students with disabilities.
- Increase funding for professional development in districts across the state to promote more inclusionary educational environments.



CALL TO ACTION

- 1 Email your legislators asking them to advance these policy priorities on behalf of students with disabilities.
- 2 Share this policy brief on your social media and mobilize others to do the same.
- 3 We need more educator voices at the policy table. If you are interested in testifying in support of issues that impact students with disabilities please contact dmendez@thetruemeasure.org.

¹ www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/wa-doesnt-fully-fund-special-education-that-could-change-soon/

² ednote.ecs.org/five-ways-that-states-limit-special-education-spending/

³ www.air.org/sites/default/files/SEEP5-Total-Expenditures.pdf