

2-17-2019

Dear Senate Committee on Education,

My name is Maria Githens and I am a Speech-Language Pathologist working full time in the public school system. I began my career 24 years ago. Back then, I had a full time caseload of 40 students. Currently, I have a caseload of 74 students and I case manage 43 of them. I am assigned two elementary schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the amendment on employment relations, specifically regarding caseload limits. Large caseloads significantly affect children receiving communication services in the public schools.

I am a member of the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA). In 2016, ASHA conducted a survey among ASHA certified SLPs who were working full time in the schools. They reported that the average caseload was 48 with a range of 31-64. My caseload is above the national average.

Large caseloads affect my ability to collaborate with a student's classroom teacher. I am often in meetings before and after school, when many teachers are available to collaborate with. Out of 99 student contact days since the Fall 2018, 74% of the time I have had an IEP meeting to attend. This means fewer opportunities to collaborate with teachers, particularly when I am split between two schools. This reduction in collaboration time affects my knowledge of how students are carrying over their skills into the general education setting and thus how I can modify the intervention strategies to increase carryover skills.

Increased caseload sizes leaves less time for me to attend professional development opportunities. I have state and national certification which requires me to obtain continuing education credits. SLPs in my district do not obtain substitutes. It is very hard for me to choose to take a day off from work because it affects the intervention service time that a large number of children receive on a daily basis. However, it is very important to me to keep learning and understanding the best, research-based intervention techniques, for various communication disorders.

Large caseload sizes have been attributed to difficulties with recruitment and retention of certified SLPs. Three years ago, my assignment changed and I began working in a school that had a history of an increased SLP turnover. Several parents made comments to me about feeling frustrated with the inconsistency and expressed relief when I assured them that I planned to stay for more than one year. Having a consistent special education case manager and service provider, results in increased knowledge about a child's unique communication needs and how it relates to the impact on not only their education, but on their family.

Large caseload sizes have resulted in an increased number of children in session groups. I fear that in the long run, progress may slow, if the intervention group size continues to grow. It is becoming more challenging to provide these services to children, given the rigor of educational academic standards. It is very difficult to arrange the intervention schedule around these academic priorities, especially when there are 30 to 44 students to schedule per day.

Large caseload sizes negatively affect children. I am hopeful that your committee will continue to reach out to SLPs in order to gather the information needed, to move toward an amendment allowing caseload limits. The rising complexity of children within Oregon schools and their SLPs need your support.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide written input.

Sincerely,

Maria Githens MS CCC-SLP