

Testimony for HB 5015

March 7, 2019

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
Oregon State Legislature

Good Morning Co-chairs Senator Frederick and Representative McLain and other members of the committee,

My name is Mark Van Hoomissen. I'm a Portland Public Schools' principal for ten long term care and treatment educational programs. Long term care and treatment (LTCT) educational programs provide school services for youth receiving intensive day or residential mental care services.

On a continuum for mental health care services, the lowest level could look like counseling sessions once a month. As you move up the continuum, counseling becomes more frequent, which could be weekly or more often. More intensive services could look like very frequent counseling with daily skills trainer support at school, in the community, etc. Farther along the continuum would be day treatment/partial hospitalization, then residential, then psychiatric hospitalization.

Students receiving these day or residential mental health care services have often experienced very serious trauma (sexual and/or physical abuse) and neglect. Some youth are struggling with addiction. Some are struggling with suicidal ideation or suicide attempts. Some are struggling with very severe depression, schizophrenia, or other more organic mental health challenges. Many of the youth are facing a combination of these issues.

Mental health service providers that PPS partners with include Morrison Child and Family Services, Trillium Family Services, Lifeworks Northwest, Salvation Army, Janus Youth Programs, and Boys and Girls Aid. All of the programs I work with are in or very near the PPS school district. We work with students in kindergarten-12th grade. Students' entry and exit is based on mental health needs for high levels of treatment. Our classrooms are located in day or residential mental health care facilities.

Depending on where you live in Oregon, you might be familiar with the Parry Center or White Shield in Portland, St. Mary's Home for the Boys in Beaverton, The Child Center in Springfield, Olalla Center for Children and Families in Lincoln County, or Homestead in Pendleton. Long term care and treatment education programs provide school services at these treatment programs. There are 40 statewide. As I mentioned, I work with ten in the Portland area.

Because of the mental health challenges the children are experiencing or have experienced, there is often massive school disruption. Students often enter treatment and enroll in our school programs very behind in core content areas. Before entering our school programs, attendance has been a challenge for students because of anxiety, trauma, and previous school failure. Across the ten LTCT schools in PPS, approximately 50% of the students are eligible for special education services.

So what happens when they're enrolled in our school program? Through a computer-based, standardized reading assessment, two-thirds of students last year showed improvement in reading skills, even though students are often with us for a short time based on treatment needs. One third of the students who completed the pre/post-test in reading demonstrated more than a year's growth. Additionally, students showed improvements in writing and math work samples. Students earn high school diplomas in our program. Students go on to post-secondary programs as well.

Why am I here today? The students I serve need your help. Based on estimates, in order to maintain current service levels in our program for next year, I'm looking at a \$1.4 million shortfall for the PPS programs alone. What do students lose if we can't figure out a way to marshal more resources? Possibly a special education coordinator that is vital to making sure students receive appropriate services and supports on their individualized education plans. Possibly a school counselor, which is a travesty because he is often the first school counselor to help our students lay out high school completion plans. Because of their school disruption, many of our high school students have never met with a school counselor before. Other losses could include paraeducator/educational assistant support in our classrooms. This support is vital to helping students maintain emotional balance so they can focus on their school work. Insufficient support for students leads to behavior challenges that reduce their learning and the learning of others. I'm not talking about a few paraeducator losses. It could be almost all of them.

In the end, without adequate funding, students could lose all of these vital supports. I've been an administrator for this program for 15 years. I admire the students' resilience. They put their best foot forward every day, even though they are experiencing significant challenges. They deserve our support.

I'm asking you to be on their team. Be their support. Have your staff contact ODE and ask them what needs to happen to provide adequate funding for LTCT programs. My request is an additional \$4 million for school programs like ours across the state. ODE staff can talk in more detail about where the shortfalls are. The 150 students I currently serve, and the 500+ that I will serve over the course of this school year, need your help. Please be on the students' team.

Thank you.

Mark Van Hoomissen
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Portland Public Schools