

Good afternoon, Chair Dembro and committee members, for the record, my name is Desi Nicodemus and I am a 5th grade teacher in North Clackamas and the first Black person elected to the Milwaukie city Council this year.

As a 5th grade teacher some of my students come from chaotic homes where they are raising themselves/ their siblings. Others have parents or guardians who attend conferences, send regular emails and volunteer on picture day. All have the human need to connect. Each one has a desire for a relationship—to be known and accepted as they are. Effective teaching requires meaningful relationships. Balancing content standards and relationships is challenging enough without the added layers of systemic racism, economic hardship, food and housing insecurity, and overcrowded classrooms. Every child is looking to be heard. They want to know they exist in the world and others validate their existence. In an academic context, students, although sometimes nervous at first, want to share their ideas with a classroom and want affirmation that their thoughts are accepted and show understanding of the lesson. Furthermore, academic student talk is the primary way students learn and stay engaged with content. Yet, when a classroom is bursting with students, there is little time for student talk. The benefits of participating in small classes increase from year to year for both teachers and students. Teachers spend more time on instruction and less time on discipline problems. Teachers know their students better, know where each child is in the learning process, and can provide more individualized instruction. Smaller classes also lead to better identification of students who need special help, increased student participation and engagement, improved behavior, and reduced retention in grade.

A Learning Specialist at my school had this to share with me about caseloads. Group sizes are too large. One purpose of SPED services is to provide “small group instruction” to our students. With larger group sizes students don't have the instruction they need.

Large caseloads mean more meetings and more paperwork, both of which take away from our time to prepare for quality instruction with our groups. Typically prep time is spent scheduling meetings or working on legal paperwork, not planning for good instruction.

One student's needs are not equal to another student's needs. If caseloads become too high, results can include the following:

Students with higher needs receive more time from the case manager spent addressing their unique needs, which pulls away from our ability to address the needs of our other students. OR

Students with higher needs don't get the time allocated from the case manager to best address their needs, resulting in a less quality education for these students.

The more complex the needs the more time is needed from the case manager and staff for the following; meetings with families, trainings for case managers, time to compile data, Time to collaborate with teachers

There is a High level of “burn-out” among special education teachers. One year, our district lost 50% of it's learning specialists and to add insult to injury quite a few of them were Educators of color. We will continue to lose teachers and students will continue to suffer if we do not act now. Thank you for your time.