

Submitter: Lillian Kruzen
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB2959
To: House Committee on Education
From: Lillian Kruzen, SLP
RE: Support for HB 2959

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Hudson, and members of the Committee–

My name is Lillian Kruzen, I am in my seventh year as a school-based Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), and I am here to express my support for House Bill 2959.

I would like to start by saying that I love being a part of our schools and supporting our children with complex communication needs in one of the places where they need it the most. Those children are our future and they deserve the best support we can give them. The reality is that giving them the best support is not possible. Not because we, as professionals, aren't capable of delivering it, but because we simply do not have enough time. The number of students on each SLP's caseload greatly determines the amount of support that can be given to each student as an individual. When we have caseloads of 50 or more students, they must be seen in groups, which reduces the amount of time that each student gets to work directly on their goals. Many SLPs, never see caseloads lower than 70 students, and many more have upwards of 100. The quality of service goes down with each student that gets added to that list. On top of this, the number of students with very significant communication needs has been growing steadily. To help those students make progress on their communication goals takes significantly more time than some simpler communication disorders. That extra time is not taken into account when looking at the number of students alone. In addition, there are many other things that require our time and attention. Paperwork that is mandated by IDEA must be completed in a specific and timely manner. There are other duties we are often assigned, such as bus duty or hall monitoring, which take precious minutes from our day. There are also meetings, many of which are a very important part of the special education process, and many of which are not yet are still required of us by the school districts. Lack of time to dedicate to the individual needs of students results in slow or limited student progress. Lack of time to dedicate to material preparation, lesson planning, paperwork, and other non-student contact work results in rushed paperwork, hastily written reports, and a lack of individualized materials for students who really need them. These issues are a double-edged sword for school districts, not only do they cause issues with student achievement and paperwork compliance.

They also contribute significantly to retention and recruitment issues for the district. Over the last seven years, I have watched dozens of school SLPs leave the schools or leave the profession altogether. They come full of hopes for the future and desire to make a difference for our children. Then they face the reality that they cannot possibly do it all. Sacrifices must be made to survive. No one wants to feel mediocre, especially doing something they love. That feeling is inevitable in our schools today, and SLPs are leaving in droves. Why stay when hospitals and private practice offer more time and money? SLPs come with noble intentions, to serve those who need us most, they leave because they have nothing left to give, and it happens all too quickly. Those who are left behind are left with no choice but to make up the difference, to serve the needs of all those children by themselves, and it only results in more children being underserved, and more professionals burning out. Oregon has faced a shortage of SLPs across settings for many years. Other states, such as Washington, have taken the time to examine the needs of their SLPs in the school setting and made improvements that made a significant difference. It is time that Oregon did the same.

Thank you for your time today and I encourage the committee to vote YES on HB 2959.

Lillian Kruzen
Speech-Language Pathologist
McMinnville School District