

Submitter: Catherine Tucker
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

My name is Catherine Tucker and I'm the Teacher Librarian at Marysville School in outer Southeast Portland. I am here today on behalf of my school community and my community of Core Enrichment Educators, formally known as Specialists. These are the educators who teach subjects like art, music, PE, and library, which can be the whole reason why some students will come to school.

Marysville is a very special school with many unique needs. We are currently serving a houseless shelter that is also taking in victims of domestic violence, as well as other low-income housing. Many of our students come to us living with trauma and need a lot of mental health support. Unfortunately, due to lack of funding, our mental health team is understaffed, which hurts our students. Next year, we are expected to lose another one of our mental health professionals who really specializes in working with students living with trauma.

Additionally, we have been implementing a neighborhood school model for the last couple of years. This means we have students in our general education classes who would otherwise be placed into special education focus classrooms. While this full inclusion model seems wonderful because yes, every child deserves to go to the school in their own neighborhood, it is not being supported well and that's mainly due to lack of special education funding.

Right now, the SPED funding cap is at 11% for the state. Portland Public Schools' average is around 17%. My school has around 23% identified SPED students. This means around half of our students aren't getting their funding needs met. For example, we do not have enough paraeducators to support all of our student needs. Our students need more one-on-one support with these educators in forms of academic support, taking preventative breaks, helping them through emotional distress, and so on. However, because we do not have enough people, these needs aren't being met.

Additionally, our special education learning center teachers are overworked and do not have time to fully do their jobs. Because of the previously mentioned lack of support from not having enough paraeducators or a fully staffed mental health team, our learning center teachers are having to step in to stop students from doing harm, eloping, and showing other unsafe behaviors. Our special education educators and students deserve better.

Core Enrichment Educators deserve better as well. Every year our jobs are on the

chopping block. Every year more and more FTE is being chipped away from us. This year, we were told we were safe from that happening. However, because Portland Public Schools is inflating class sizes, this gives them an excuse to cut our FTE again. This is because last year our FTE was cut into .2 increments coinciding with days of the week. When there are fewer sections of classes per grade level because the students are being consolidated, that means Core Enrichment Educators don't need to be teaching as many classes per week; thus, Core Enrichment Educators are again being cut by 1 or 2 days a week in their buildings.

Many of us are already working in at least 2 buildings—because of the cuts, some might now have to work in more. This is detrimental to our students because they can't form a good relationship with a teacher who is only in the building one day a week. This is also detrimental to these programs because educators are having to teach multiple different populations of students and manage multiple different classrooms of supplies.

Our students and schools deserve better, and this can happen by funding special education fully and properly funding education to at least the QEM, if not more. I hope you all make the right choice.