

Testimony to the Task Force on Special Education and Related Services Funding

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Task Force members, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on special education funding.

My name is Brandyn McDonald. I have three children in my local public school system and am also a substitute teacher in our local district.

I have two children who've previously required IEPs for speech delays. Both of these children received stellar support from our speech pathologists, teachers, and administration in supporting their development and now no longer require special education supports. I am also the aunt to an incredible little boy who is autistic and requires significant modifications to be successful in the school setting. I've seen how dependent he and his family are on the supports provided by the school and how they are helping him reach his full potential. But it's my experience as a substitute teacher over the last few years has given me much deeper insight into the public school special education programs. I think of one little boy who at three in preschool couldn't be understood by anyone to now being a third grader who reads aloud in class with confidence. I also think about a little boy I met as a first grader who received services to assist his social-emotional development as a first grader who is now a bright fifth grader who can manage his emotions and actions in a way that no longer impedes his education. I think of the little girl I worked with last week who is so quiet and meek in the general classroom but in the special education room blossoms and feels safe to take the time she needs to learn the material. I could go on and on with stories of the children I've seen reach goals with the support of a special education team who works tirelessly for them.

Along with witnessing these incredible stories, I've also witnessed the limitations being placed on our education system. I can tell you first hand that the class sizes, along with para support, can make an incredible difference in the quality of education I'm able to provide. On occasion I'm with smaller class sizes or with ample para support and can tell you that I can see and feel a difference in the education I'm providing those children. All children have specific needs and we can best meet those needs with lower ratios and proper para support. If our district was not having to pull from general education funds to fulfill legal and moral obligations for special education they could hire more teachers and increase pay for paras so we can provide these optimal learning opportunities on a more regular basis.

Thank you for taking the time to hold this meeting and discuss the crucial funding our public education system needs. Should you have more questions about my experiences I'd be happy to share further.

Brandyn McDonald