COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
PUBLIC HEARING
on
Special Education and Bill 26-63, "Advancing Equity in Special Education Protocols Amendment Act of 2025"
on
Wednesday, November 4, 2026, at 2:30 p.m.

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson. I am testifying in my individual capacity as Ward 5 member of the State Board of Education, and I am not representing the views of the Board as a whole.

First, I would like to say that I believe that the stability, improved communication protocols, and supplementation for exceeded staff-to-student ratios in self-contained classrooms outlined in Bill 26-63 are necessary and beneficial for better serving special education students in the District.

On special education broadly, I've said something like this in the past, and it remains true even as I have continued to have many more conversations with families about their special education experiences: nearly every family's story is the same, regardless of sector, the family had to fight for every service they got for their student, often succeeding only after engaging an advocate or lawyer, and they have to continue to fight for follow through on the student's IEP.

I've also heard from teachers who are trying to serve students the best they can, but struggle to do so in classrooms with staff-to-student ratios that exceed what is manageable, and in the case of DCPS, reportedly exceed the maximum ratios established in the WTU contract.

I appreciate this committee's framing of inquiry around the reasons behind the district's reliance on litigation and challenges around service provision, but it is hard for me not to conclude that it is a problem of lack of will and prioritization at the system level.

To better serve the city's students with disabilities, I recommend the following:

Budget for the 2024–2025 UPSFF Working Group recommendations for special education funding weights, including a level 5 weight. However, I would add that after this step, we should assess whether it adequately meets school and student needs and allow for the possibility of supplemental funding outside of the UPSFF directed at schools that serve especially high percentages of students with disabilities.

OSSE should issue statewide guidance for supporting students with disabilities as other states have done. Last April, the State Board passed a resolution "Calling for a Statewide Framework for Special Education Instructional Best Practices," based in part on the

premise that students benefit from equipping all teachers with SPED knowledge and pedagogical training and which would include:

1. Guidance on effective inclusive practice and specialized instruction in general education settings
2. Guidance on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiation, accommodations, and modifications
3. Guidance for co-planning and collaboration between general and special educators
4. Strategies for small-group instruction, modifying content and materials, and progress monitoring
5. Guidance on the special education process, including early identification and referral procedures
6. Examples of effective instruction across grade levels and content areas.

Thank you,
Robert Henderson