



# Bargaining Fact Sheet – Special Education

## Special Education in a Downward Spiral

For years PPS has been shortchanging special education. Students with some of the greatest needs aren't getting the services and individualized attention they deserve, and now *these problems are rippling across entire buildings.*

The District has no plan to stop this downward spiral, and they have refused to consider the various proposals PAT has put forward to stabilize, and potentially reverse, this situation.

## Short-Staffing Impacts Everyone

Special education caseloads are through the roof this year, aggravated by a significant number of unfilled positions.

There are also dozens of vacancies for critical support roles like para-educators and occupational therapists. These vacancies are hitting classroom educators even harder because the District has no system for substitute coverage when support staff are out.

Instead, classroom teachers, specialists, and even administrators, are being forced to step in—whether it's stopping a student who's running down the hall or administering bathroom protocols when there's no para-educator available. This disrupts the learning environment, significantly increases our workload, and can pose real safety concerns for both students and staff. It also means other things are ignored in order to deal with the most pressing problems.

## Missing Additional Supports

But the problem goes far beyond a shortage of staff. In many buildings we are missing



other critical supports, from de-escalation spaces to tiered academic and behavioral interventions.

*Without these baseline interventions, achievement gaps will widen, not narrow.*

## Gaps in the Continuum of Services

The District has also eliminated key elements in the continuum of special education services.

PAT supports students being placed in the least restrictive environment possible. However, this is no longer an option for many students thanks to the cuts from the District.

In addition to adding more tiered interventions, the District must also restore behavior classrooms and other elements in the continuum of services.

## **Punitive Response from the District**

Unfortunately, the District has responded to these cascading problems by bullying and blaming educators.

When vacancies leave elementary special education teachers with a caseload one-and-a-half times what it should be, they are given unsatisfactory evaluations and put on a plan of assistance.

Last spring, when specialists and special educators fell behind on their paperwork, the Director of Special Education sent out threatening directives and set unreasonable deadlines for getting documentation done.

## **Meeting Federal Mandates?**

We have class action grievances against the District over special education workload, and under current conditions there is a real concern that many students cannot get their federally mandated IEP minutes and other services. *This is a pressing issue for educators, since our licenses are on the line.* But it also raises serious questions about the District's commitment to our students with the most serious needs.

The IEP process is intended to be a space where educators collaboratively develop an individualized plan to meet each student's needs. Unfortunately IEP meetings are treated more like a box that administrators must check off.

For years, the message from PPS administration has been clear: We don't write goals based on what we think students need, we write goals based on what we think we can afford. This has to stop.

## **PAT Contract Proposals To Address Special Education Problems**

The District has refused to address these critical issues during bargaining. However PAT has several proposals to address these problems, including:

### ➤ **Dedicated Time for Case Management**

PAT has proposed special educators have additional time for case management, including one period a day for grades 6-12, and one dedicated day a month at the elementary level.

### ➤ **Restoring Flexibility for Scheduling IEP Meetings**

PAT has made a formal proposal to restore the past practice of allowing educators to be paid for IEP meetings held during their planning time, if that is more convenient time than scheduling a meeting after school.

### ➤ **Restoring Full Continuum of Services**

PAT supports expanded options such as learning centers, self-contained classrooms, and behavior classrooms as well as ensuring that mainstreamed students have adequate supports.

### ➤ **Overload Triggers and Overload Pay for Special Educators and Specialists**

We've proposed caseload triggers and overload pay for special educators, speech language pathologists, media specialists, and school psychologists. *(See the chart on the next page with PAT's specific caseload triggers and overload pay proposals.)*

### Overload Pay for Special Education Teachers and Specialists

	<b>Teaching Load Case Load Triggers*</b>	<b>% of Professional Educator's Salary Increased per Student over the Trigger</b>
Self-Contained Special Ed. Focus Program Teachers	13 students	7.69% per student over trigger*
Special Ed. Teachers (Learning Center HS)	32 students	3.13% per student over trigger*
Special Ed. Teachers (Learning Center MS)	31 students	3.23% per student over trigger*
Special Ed. Teachers (Learning Center PK-5)	30 students	3.33% per student over trigger*
Speech and Language Pathologists	50 students	2% per student over trigger*
Counselors	1 to 525 students	2% per 10 students over trigger* (triggered by first student over)
School Psychologists	1 to 925 students	2% per 25 students over trigger* (triggered by first student over)
Media Specialists	1 to 925 students	2% per 25 students over trigger* (triggered by first student over)

\* Caseload trigger numbers are not desired average caseloads, but rather extreme caseload numbers that require overload pay if exceeded. These trigger proposals serve to hopefully dissuade the District from creating extreme overload situations. PAT is still fighting to lower overall caseload / class size numbers as well!