

Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name Alisha Webster, and I am a special education teacher in Dickinson. I am testifying in support of HB 1530.

My first year as a special education teacher I had a caseload of twelve. This year I have thirty-two, as well as an additional twelve students who I see either daily or several times a week. I have had students come to my room for tests per their IEP and refuse to enter because the room is too full. I've had students come to me for a cool down, become more overwhelmed and go on to have an outburst in the classroom. This has sometimes led to dangerous situations for students. Daily, there are problems that I could have prevented if I had not been treading water trying to meet the legal minimums for my students.

This year I am averaging 30 minutes of prep during content hours per week, and I have been working very hard at taking a 30-minute lunch four days a week. My contract says it should be one and a half hours of prep and 45 minutes of lunch per day. There is no way that I could get this time while still meeting the legal minimums of student IEPs. I am working fifty plus hours a week and am still not able to give my students the services they will need to be successful adults. I know the way I was able to change lives and set kids up for success with smaller caseloads, and it breaks my heart that I can't do this now.

Our school is constantly short of para educators. This also sets students up for outbursts which might put other students at risk. More frequently it results in students who sit in classes unable to learn, thus compromising their futures.

The job of being a special education has become less and less possible in recent years. This causes us to lose good people in this field, and students too have poorer life outcomes. A study looking into a solution to this problem would be very important.