

Teaching, Learning, and Enrollment
Committee Meeting
Thursday, October 9, 2025 4:30 PM

Dr. Matthew Prophet Education Center
501 N. Dixon St.
Portland, OR 97227

Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Public Comment - To sign up for public comment email Public Comment@pps.net or call 503-916-3741
3. Overview: Special Education Services
4. Adjourn

Special Education Program

A Call to Action



PORTLAND

Public Schools

Date



TOGETHER,

WE RISE

WITH EXCELLENCE. WITH PURPOSE.



LARGEST DISTRICT IN OREGON

DISTRICT INFORMATION

SUPERINTENDENT + BOARD MEMBERS

Superintendent
Dr. Kimberlee Armstrong

Zone 1
Christy Splitt

Zone 5
Virginia La Forte

Zone 2
Michelle DePass
(Vice-Chair)

Zone 6
Stephanie Engelsman

Zone 3
Patte Sullivan

Zone 7
Edward (Eddie) Wang (Chair)

Zone 4
Rashelle Chase-Miller

Student Representative
Ian Ritorto

STUDENT ENROLLMENT*

44,086 TOTAL

41,630

STUDENTS IN DISTRICT SCHOOLS

794

STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMS

356

STUDENTS IN SPECIAL SERVICES PROGRAMS

1,306

STUDENTS IN PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS

45

ELEMENTARY



10

HIGH

11

K-8

14

MIDDLE

1

K-12

District Continuous Improvement Plan
GOAL AREAS



ATTENDANCE



LITERACY

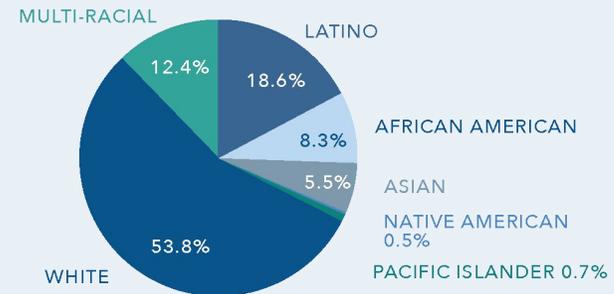


MATH



9th Grade SUCCESS

STUDENT INFORMATION



RECEIVE ESL SERVICES

10%

ELIGIBLE FOR FREE MEALS via direct certification

31.3%
2023-24 school year

RECEIVE SPED SERVICES

17%

*Numbers are approximate

Agenda - PPS Special Education - An Overview

1. Special Education Program 2025-26
2. Supports for students receiving special education services
3. Special Education Funding
4. Listening to Action



The Birth of IDEA

- Before 1975, millions of children with disabilities were excluded from public schools.
- Those who did attend were often placed in segregated, custodial settings with little access to learning.

IDEA guaranteed:

- A Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- Services in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Procedural safeguards protecting student and parent rights

IDEA was not just a law — it was a civil rights milestone.

Our Commitment In PPS

We are committed to **eradicating ableism** in all its forms.

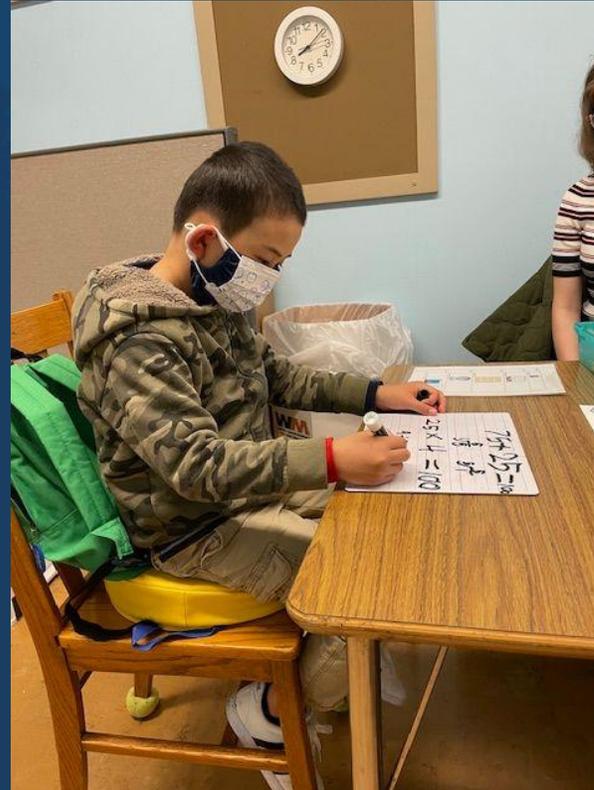
Ableism is the belief that students with disabilities are less capable, less valuable, or not entitled to the same opportunities as their peers.

Ableism shows up when:

- Students are separated instead of included.
- Adults lower expectations.
- Systems are designed for adult convenience, not student belonging.

Centering the Needs of Students

This young person is a bright and curious 2nd grader who loves building things, asking questions about how the world works, and making people laugh. He also experiences intense emotions that sometimes lead to yelling, running, or shutting down when situations feel overwhelming. After several behavioral incidents at his school, his IEP team determined he qualified for special education under the category of Emotional and Behavioral Disability.



Amazing 4th grade student that experiences a visual impairment in addition to physical and other medical issues.

What is Special Education?

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and OAR 581-015

- Instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Specially Designed instruction to provide access to core academic program.
- Special education instruction is provided in a number of settings, such as: in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings
- Instruction must be provided to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and includes provisions that ensure that children with disabilities are educated with nondisabled children, to the maximum extent appropriate.
- A child must be educated in the school he or she would attend if he or she did not have a disability. Each LEA must also ensure that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Inclusion: A General Education initiative.

It's important to emphasize that while the shift to neighborhood schools aims to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, this effort is fundamentally a **general education initiative**. And, it is fundamentally good for **ALL** students. This is supported by extensive research.



We all move forward when we meet the instructional needs within the grade level classrooms of our students furthest from educational justice. By supporting students with disabilities alongside their peers, we build a stronger community and will improve the quality of instruction and achievement of every student. This is NOT a special education initiative--it is about making our general education spaces accessible to all learners.

Inclusive Neighborhood Schools

Inclusion Benefits Everyone: 30+ years of research show intentional, meaningful inclusion supports ALL students, increases academic achievement, sense of belonging, and improves the outcomes for students with disabilities.

Context:

- ~17+% of students served in special education.
- Disproportionality in special education and specialized placements
- Current State: We outperform the state and have made progress that we are excited about and yet the Opportunity/Achievement exists. Gap: 80%/80% GenEd, yet > 30% ELA >20% Math.

Students & families Question: 2023-24 Listening Sessions: *"Why are we the only students that are not allowed to attend our community school?"*

Shifting Mindset: Collective responsibility – " Our Students."**Our Commitment:** Every student, especially those with disabilities, experience a sense of belonging within their neighborhood school.

**"The entire system will improve when meet the needs of the most vulnerable.
By supporting students with disabilities in their own neighborhoods alongside their friends and siblings, we build a stronger, more compassionate school community for everyone."**

Reclaiming the Why: Leading Through Challenge to Build an Inclusive Future: Key Goals

- Provide a continuum of instructional services directly in neighborhood schools.
- Sense of belonging and stronger community.
- Collaborative instruction and shared responsibility
- Interrupt systems of segregation.
- Inclusive Focus
- Reimagine relationships to cultivate belonging - Rightful Presence



Debunking the “Myths” of Inclusion



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

W HARING CENTER
FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- Myth: Inclusion means all students will receive all services in the general education classroom (often stated as “no more resource”).
- Myth: Inclusion means students with behavioral challenges will remain in the general education classroom, even when they significantly disrupt the learning process.
- Myth: Inclusion = Co-teaching for all!
- Myth: Inclusion means schools will find it more difficult to meet student performance standards.
- Myth: Students in pull-out programs receive individualized, one-on-one support.
- Myth: Inclusion is not for students with severe disabilities.
- Myth: Inclusive education is more expensive than educating students in special education classrooms.

Portland Public Schools - Special Education Program by the numbers.

Representation	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26 (Oct. 1)
Special Education Identification	7379	7707	7136	7006	7362	7450	7624	7614
District Enrollment	49550	49478	47314	45497	45456	44819	44086	
Representation	14.8%	15.5%	15.1%	15.3%	16.2%	16.6%	17.2%	

Representation

	2021-22	2022-2023	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26 (Oct.1)
Autism Spectrum Disorder	895	916	994	1108	1442
Speech/Language Impairment	1736	1846	1944	1976	1900
Emotional Behavior Disability	416	377	387	397	342
Intellectually Disabled	197	172	168	167	147
Other Health Impairment	1617	1613	1610	1622	1637
Specific Learning Disability	1696	1620	1739	1693	1544
Other	245	372	408	428	602

2024/25 Total Students with IEP

	%	District%
American Indian / Alaskan Native	.9	.5
Asian	3.5	5.5
Black / African American	11	8.3
Hispanic	19.7	5.5
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	.4	.7
Two or More	12.6	6.7
White	51.5	53.8

Special Service Delivery in PPS



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Special Education Service Delivery and Instruction

Academic and Behavioral Instructional Services

- Learning Center

Focused or Specialized Instruction

- Social Emotional Skills
- Communication Behavior Instruction
- Intensive Skills Instruction

Specialized Programming

- Community Transition Program
- Early Childhood Special Education
- Special School - Pioneer
- Columbia Regional Inclusive Services
- Providence Program
- Day and Residential Treatment

Supplemental Service Providers

- Speech and Language Services
- School Psychology Services
- Occupational and Physical Therapy Services
- Qualified Mental Health Providers
- Adapted PE Services
- Medical Services
- Paraeducators/Therapeutic Intervention Coaches

How is Special Education Funded In Oregon?

Weighted Average Daily Membership (ADM-W) for a Student that Receives Special Education Services - 11% Cap and the limit on the High Cost Disability Fund

17% of Students in PPS receive Special Education Services.

Federal Funding

Student Investment Account

Special Education Revenue

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Federal	\$8,598,882	\$8,969,445	\$9,833,992	\$8,937,186
State Special Education ADM-W Funding Allocation	\$56,347,415.00	\$59,440,839.00	\$59,627,555.00	\$65,490,698.00
Student Investment Account Supplement	\$1,062,845	\$1,200,000	\$1,200,032	\$3,274,369
High Cost Disability	(1018) \$10,416,198	(1126) \$9,968,880	(1127) \$8,401,473	
ESSER	-	\$4,228,059	\$7,060,629	
Total	\$75,362,495	\$78,379,164	\$77,863,020	
ADM-W W/O 11% Cap	\$68,714,960.00	\$73,082,832.00	\$76,070,462.00	\$83,409,326.00

Special Education Expenditures

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Personnel (Instructional and Support Services)	\$116,826,294	\$120,971,133	\$128,942,735	\$134,455,012
Instructional (Non-Personnel)	\$2,724,068	\$4,091,847	\$4,251,254	\$5,673,945
Support Services (Non-Personnel)	\$5,616,694	\$5,543,263	\$5,247,284	\$5,458,593
Extended School Year	\$305,044	\$911,307	\$405,929	\$557,580
Transportation	\$15,029,240	\$21,129,819	\$23,371,099	\$13,317,368

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total Special Education	\$140,501,340	\$152,647,369	\$162,218,301	\$159,462,499

Special Education Building Staffing

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Special Education Teacher FTE	258	261.5	266.5	266.3	266.8
SLP FTE	98.4	95	82.8	85.6	98.4
Total School Psychologist FTE	55	55.2	61.8	66.8	66.8
OT/PT FTE	28	25.75	26.9	25.9	25.5

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Paraeducator FTE (K-12)	429.23	446.18	463	465.85	465.38

Listening To Action

- Staff and Family Listening Sessions January 2025 to July 202
- Every PPS campus, special education staff, and building leaders.
- Community Conversation and Family/Parent Sessions.
- Focus: **gather direct feedback** from staff, parents, and families to identify systemic challenges in special education.



The Issue: A System Under Strain

Key Findings

Pervasive Staffing Needs: Shortages of qualified staff. Primary theme is lack of filled qualified substitute paraeducators. Reports of overwhelming caseloads, and high burnout.

Student Needs and Safety: Increasing complexity of student needs and significant safety concerns due to understaffing and lack of training.

Inclusive Practices: Lack of a clear framework, inadequate training, and insufficient resources for effective implementation.

Systemic Breakdowns: Confusing, inefficient, and untrustworthy processes with significant communication failures.

Resources and Training: Gaps in professional development, lack of appropriate curriculum and materials, and the dismantling of central specialist teams.

Staffing Data

Paraeducator Substitute Fill Rates

School Year	Total Need	Total Unfilled Positions	Low Fill Rate	High Fill Rate
2025-26 (10/2)	3646	2213	23%	51%
2024-25	17311	8873	24%	48%
2023-24	10336	7388	13%	47%

Total Paraeducators: Approximately 466

Special Education Staff Vacancies

School Year (October)	Special Education Teacher	School Psychologist	SLP	Other	Paraeducator
2025-26	6	4	8	2	22
2024-25	14	2	10	3	19
2023-24	11	5	7	2	37

Total Special Education Service Providers: Approximately 458

Key Findings from Parents & Families

1. **Accountability and Non-Compliance:** A pervasive belief that the District fails to follow the law (IDEA) and implement IEPs, with no clear path for accountability.
2. **Inadequate Resources and Staffing:** Unfilled substitutes, Staff allocation to schools, qualified staff, and essential resources, seen as the root cause of systemic failures.
3. **Poor Educational Quality:** Low academic expectations, non-rigorous instruction, and segregation of students. A demand for meaningful inclusion.
4. **Failed Partnership:** The relationship is broken, characterized by poor communication, a lack of collaboration, and set up so that families must "fight" for services.

Immediate Action

Based on feedback, these areas required urgent attention to stabilize our system and begin rebuild trust:

- ❑ **Paraeducator Substitute Staffing**
- ❑ **Implement a Weighted Caseload Model at Neighborhood Schools**
- ❑ **System of Professional Learning**
- ❑ **Standardize and Clarify Processes**
- ❑ **Pause the Planned Expansion of initiatives**
- ❑ **Rebuild Trust Through Transparency**
- ❑ **IEP focus aligned with DCIP**



Long Term Actions -Systemic & Procedural Overhaul

1. **Process Audit and Co-creation:** Convene workgroups to audit and streamline all major special education processes.
 - **Workgroups:**
 - i. Change of placement
 - ii. Procedural manual
 - iii. Professional Learning
 - iv. Staffing Allocation
 - v. Grade level Transitions.
2. **Communication and accessing tools:** Revamp protocols to ensure proactive, clear messaging from the central office and streamline access to needed tools and information.
3. Foster a supportive, compliant, and effective Special Education Program



Advancement of Special Education Services



Our Commitment: To foster a supportive, compliant, and effective Special Education

1. The IEP Process:

- a. Implement the **IEP Toolkit and resources to support workload**
- b. Enhance parent/guardian partnerships through family-focused resources and community conversations.

2. Compliance with IDEA Requirements:

- a. Ongoing **internal audit**.
- b. Implement **file review protocols with feedback**.
- c. **Accountability system** for foundational IEP processes.

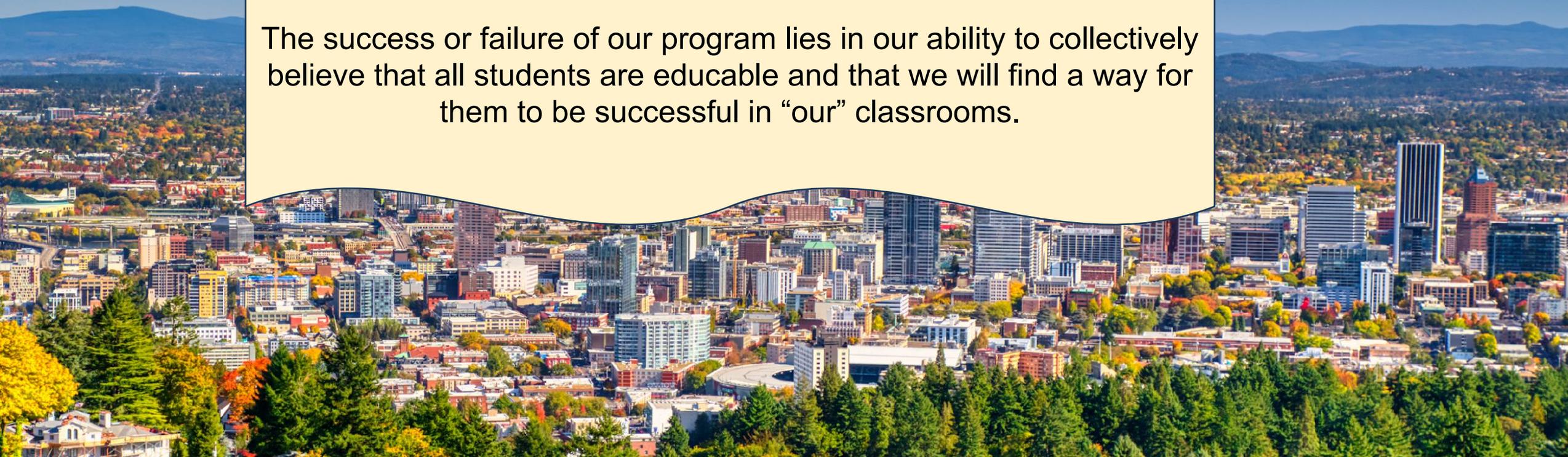
3. Rebuilding Trust

- a. **Co-Construction:** Workgroups co-construct actions addressing listening session themes.
- b. **Communication:** Transparently communicate all actions and progress.
- c. **Presence:** Ensure district decision-makers are present in schools to understand daily realities.

“We have to move from fingers to a fist.”



The success or failure of our program lies in our ability to collectively believe that all students are educable and that we will find a way for them to be successful in “our” classrooms.





Questions?



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Subtitle