

## **Background Information on Special Education Services**

### **Student Count**

The October 2022 count for students that receive special education service is 7,223 students. This is slightly higher than our 2021-22 school year count of 7,164 by **59 students**. Based on current enrollment estimates the percentage of students that receive special education services in PPS is approximately 16.8%.

### **Learning Center Program**

PPS currently allocates **183.1 FTE** to support students in the Learning Center Program. Last year's staffing (2021-22) was 178.5 FTE.

**More than 80%** of students receiving special education services in the Learning Center Program **spend their day within a general education classroom**. Because of this, caseloads for special education teachers that serve in the Learning Center are 28:1.

Overall current enrollment identifies the ratio of student to teacher at 24:1.

### **Specialized Focused Classrooms**

Portland Public Schools also serves students with disabilities on a continuum of special education services including specialized focused classrooms. These classrooms include our Intensive Skills, Social Emotional Skills, and Communication Behavior classrooms.

Caseloads are typically between 10-11 students to a special education teacher and 3.0 paraeducators in each of these classrooms.

We currently have 914 students being served in our K-12 focused classrooms and 83 FTE special education teachers. This is an 11:1 student to teacher ratio.

Forecasting identified the need to serve 958 students with 84.5 FTE. Average ratios during the 2021-22 school year were 10:1 across these classrooms.

### **PPS Social Emotional Skills Classrooms**

PPS Social Emotional Skills Classrooms (included within the numbers above) across the system have additional FTE provided through a Qualified Mental Health Provided and a Therapeutic Intervention Coach (TICs). Specifically within that program there are 267 students with 24 FTE special education teachers, 15.5 QMHP, 61 Paraeducators, and 19 TICs for a total of approximately 120 working in support of the significant needs of the 267 students (approximately a 2:1 ratio).

### **Paraeducators**

Portland Public Schools opened the 2022-23 school year with over 70 Paraeducator vacancies. **We currently have 32 vacancies**. We recognize the struggles schools are facing in the midst of the paraeducator staffing shortage. The central office teams are engaged in extensive recruitment efforts that include:

- [Building support through our media partners](#)
- Partnering with special education recruitment agencies to address staffing shortages

- Bringing the process for verifying paraeducator competencies in-house to speed up the hiring process
- Offering a \$3,000 paraeducator retention bonus in addition to our bargained hourly wages and benefits for staff represented by the Portland Federation of School Professionals (PFSP)
- Continuing to advertise open positions and posting on multiple local, state, and national hiring platforms and special education professional organizations. We have also advertised at each of our local and regional community colleges, colleges, and universities.

Any assistance pushing out paraeducator [recruitment materials](#) is appreciated.

### Feeding Team

Portland Public Schools staff are focused on the safety of all students, especially students with significant medical needs, during the eating process. As a district we assess and establish specific plans that are incorporated into individual students' IEP related to their eating needs. The district has a team of staff with exceptional expertise in this area and is working on expanding the capacity of all professionals within our schools to address needs in a tiered support structure.

During the budgeting and forecasting process last spring the district forecasted 120 students across the system that required safe eating protocols outlined within their IEPs. This was significantly lower than the 160 students forecasted the year prior. Staff assigned to the PPS feeding team in the 2021-22 school year included 2.0 Speech Language Pathologist, 2.0 Occupational Therapist, and a .5 nurse focused on training and developing safe eating protocols for 160 students. One Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) resigned from the feeding team during the forecasting period so the district reduced the total SLP FTE for the 2022-23 school year to 1.4 FTE based on the significant reduction for students requiring support (from 160 to 120). **Current data indicates that there are 104 students on the SEP caseload and 20 students in the assessment and referral process.**

PPS also partnered with Emily Homer to provide professional development to all PPS SLPs to increase capacity of our school-based professionals to respond to the needs of students assigned to their schools. She was recognized as a Fellow of the Association by ASHA in 2018 and was the 1999 recipient of the Louis M. DiCarlo Award for the establishment of an interdisciplinary dysphagia team in her school district. Since her swallowing and feeding team procedure was first established, it has been shared and subsequently implemented in districts throughout the country.

Portland Public Schools Occupational Therapists and Physical Therapists are engaged in similar professional learning with experts from the OHSU feeding team and also the head of the University of Pacific Occupational Therapy Department.

### Core Curriculum and Professional Development.

There has been an intentional collaboration and focus between the Office of Teaching and Learning and the Special Education Department to ensure special education staff across PPS received core instructional materials in the same manner their general education peers did. **This focus was born directly from staff feedback during the 2021-22 school year.** This has included access to professional development. The Great Minds Curriculum which includes Wit & Wisdom (ELA), Foundations (Phonics), Haggerty (Phonemic Awareness), and Geodes (Books) curriculums

adopted and being implemented within our schools was reviewed and vetted by the Advisors of Instructional Resources (AIR) committee that included special education representatives prior to adoption as outlined in the [adoption toolkit](#) process. As outlined in our [Strategic Plan](#), it is essential our students with disabilities have **access to inclusive settings** and for all special education teachers to have access to the core instructional resources and also receive professional development alongside their general education teaching peers. As a system we hear the feedback of our staff on their professional development and will work in collaboration with them to ensure access to core materials and meaningful connections for each of our special educators in their learning in service to students.