

Dear School Board Members and Director of Schools,

First, let me begin by saying that I do not envy the position that you are in. We are all very grateful for the time and dedication that all of you are putting into our schools and students. We are aware that it is difficult to have hard conversations and make almost impossible decisions while also living in the public eye. So, before I begin this letter of concern, please know that we thank you for your service.

I am a teacher in District 5. I proudly serve Elk Valley Elementary STEM School, which owns my heart at full capacity. I currently have 17 third graders and 16 fourth graders that I teach ELA and Social Studies to daily. I truly enjoy my job. I have always had a passion for serving children in some capacity. Any of you who know me on a personal level know that I work tirelessly and volunteer about 80% of my free time to serve our community, especially the youth. This becomes a very emotional event for me when there is talk about how these children, whom I love dearly, may lose out on opportunities, and that just seems so unfair.

Mrs. McCoy made a comment that I truly respected in a recent school board meeting. She stated that being equal is not what is fair to all students, but equity is. In my opinion, equity should be the most important goal for our students. Providing each student in Campbell County with equitable opportunities to succeed is what we, as a whole, should strive for.

I was questioned about why I did not “fight” for my school when I spoke at the most recent school board meeting. The answer to this is simple: I do truly care that my school is going to lose a teacher, and it hurts me badly for my students in my classroom, along with the students I see every day in the hallways. However, when I spoke out for White Oak, I was speaking out for all students in our school district. When you begin to take away access to teachers for students at one school, you end up with teachers who double their workload. As a result, we as teachers love our students, so we bear down and go to work. Unfortunately, this sends the message, “This is possible.”

The reality of this, it is NOT possible. Students sitting in these current classrooms are suffering. They have a teacher who makes it look possible on the outside, because let’s face it, teachers in many shapes and forms are superheroes, but what is lacking? Teachers have to pick and choose which standards to skip. Teachers have to pick and choose which subject to leave out that day. This is forcing our hands to “teach to the test” being sure that we are only worrying about those standards that students are going to face on the TNReady testing, because that teacher is also worried about their effectiveness, retention, and now funding based on the test. This is not an equitable education.

Students, regardless of schools, should have access to grade-level content as well as ALL standards. Students sitting in an equitable classroom in Campbell County Schools should have access to the same education that every student across the state has access to, especially when they are being measured for success and compared to every student across the state.

I have heard, “That’s a 10-1 ratio.” To be quite honest, that ratio means nothing when the workload is doubled on the teacher, because, regardless, the teacher has to ensure that each student is set up for success. The only way to do that is by teaching them the same content that other students have access to, not by limiting it.

I understand the numbers. I understand that some students have access to more dollars in our county than other students do, but combining classrooms and grade levels is not the answer.

Unfortunately, I know that my letter will be read, and then I will receive a response along the lines of, "We understand your frustrations, but this is our only option." I would like you to do me a favor, though. Please explain to me where and what you expect a teacher to cut in their own classroom? I am going to provide an example of a real classroom in the 5<sup>th</sup> district right now. Please look over it to make suggestions on what should stay and what should go.

At White Oak School, there is currently a combined classroom of 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade. In this classroom, there are 21 kids. That looks like a wonderful ratio of 1 teacher. However, here are the state guidelines that teachers are held to as far as content and instruction time:

- 120 minutes of **uninterrupted** first-grade ELA
- 120 minutes of **uninterrupted** second-grade ELA
- 60 minutes of **uninterrupted** first-grade Math
- 60 minutes of **uninterrupted** second-grade Math
- 30 minutes of first-grade Science
- 30 minutes of second-grade Science
- 30 minutes of first-grade Social Studies
- 30 minutes of second-grade Social Studies
- 30 minutes of lunch
- 40 minutes of **mandated** recess
- 45 minutes of planning/specials

This alone equals 595 minutes of the day or 9.91 hours.

Now, what if a student is below grade level, but not quite in TIER 4 yet? That adds an additional 30 minutes for each grade level and subject for TIER 2 kids, and 45 minutes for each grade level and subject for TIER 3 kids.

This shows there is simply not enough time in the day for an equitable education for the students of this classroom.

Some will say, "You can teach all ELA at once, and all Math at once." Let's break down the standards that are **REQUIRED** by our state to teach in these grade levels.

For reading, there are:

First Grade

- Foundational Literacy- 7
- Reading- 19
- Speaking and Listening- 6
- Writing- 9

Second Grade

- Foundational Literacy- 5

- Reading- 19
- Speaking and Listening- 6
- Writing- 9

#### For Math

##### First Grade

- Operations and Algebraic Thinking- 14
- Measurement and Data- 5
- Geometry- 3

##### Second Grade

- Operations and Algebraic Thinking- 4
- Numbers and Operations in Base Ten- 9
- Measurement and Data- 10
- Geometry- 3

#### For Science

##### First Grade

- Physical Science- 3
- Life Science- 6
- Earth and Space Science- 3
- Engineering, Technology, and Applications of Science- 3

##### Second Grade

- Physical Science- 7
- Life Science- 5
- Earth and Space Science- 5
- Engineering, Technology, and Applications of Science- 5

#### For Social Studies

##### First Grade

- Culture- 3
- Economics- 6
- Geography- 5
- Government & Civics- 7
- History- 5

## Second Grade

- Culture- 3
- Economics- 7
- Geography- 8
- Government & Civics- 10
- History- 4

This comes to a total of 223 standards the teacher is responsible for. We need to teach all 4 subjects every day, correct? The equals approximately 56 days of teaching, teaching one standard per day out of 180 school days. That seems doable, until you have actually been in a classroom and taught children. It is impossible to spend one day on a standard and have the children master it. Many standards, especially reading and math, take weeks for students to be successful, not less than 4 days that this will allow per standard for the students and the teacher with combined classrooms.

As you see, not only is combining grades inequitable for students in the classroom, it is highly inequitable for the teacher and will lead to teacher burnout, as well as hostile work environments.

This does, however, bring me to another question. On the three proposed budgets, there is one position being cut at Central Office. Due to this position being cut, someone else at Central Office is going to have to endure the workload of that position. They, however, will receive an almost \$7,000 stipend for taking on additional work. The teachers who also have to endure the additional workloads due to cuts, where is their stipend? This also begs the question, why can workloads not be doubled at Central Office?

Teachers, paraprofessionals, cooks, janitors, principals, specials teachers, these are all positions that work face-to-face, directly with a student every day. You are asking them to double their work; why not the ones who are not directly working with the heart of our district, the students?

What is equitable? Providing the same opportunities for a quality education for EVERY student of the Campbell County Public School District. What is not equitable? Cutting away those who impact students' lives every day, but maintaining all but one position at Central Office, offering a stipend for the person who picks up that workload, while offering no additional incentive to the teacher who you are physically and mentally causing hardship by doubling their workload.

I truly hope you have finished this letter to this point. I graciously ask that you please respond to my above question of what subject, what standard, and what kids we leave out of learning while still providing an equitable education for all.

Thank you,

Bethany Hendrickson

Elk Valley Elementary School

