

Dear House Education Committee,

My name is Jennifer Latham and I am an instructional para-educator at Needham Elementary School in Durango. I have been in this profession for 10 years and I take great pride in the important role that I play in educating our scholars, and working alongside and in collaboration with my teacher colleagues. I am asking you all to support HB21-1087.

I provide direct one-on-one and small group instruction to students across the learning spectrum, from those below grade level to above. I am an essential partner with my teacher colleagues in ensuring our students are successful, develop agency and actively engage in their learning. Our teachers are expected to do so much these days, especially this year with cohorting of students. Differentiation is challenging for one teacher to successfully deliver single-handedly to our youngest primary students, which is where I come in. I can read the room and navigate to assist those who appear to be struggling, as well as work with small groups of students at similar learning levels who need extra support. For me, this is the most rewarding part of my job, getting to know students on an individual basis and being able to deliver instruction according to their learning style. It is gratifying knowing what a difference I make in their education journey.

This year, I quickly recognized the impact that Covid cases would likely have on our teaching staff. Of my own volition last fall, I got my 3-year substitute authorization so that if, and likely when, a guest teacher (aka substitute) shortage occurred, I would be able to shift into coverage for a classroom teacher in whose cohort I work. District administration or building leadership did not think of this. I did. Because of my foresight, for the past two weeks I have been substituting for a class full of students who know me well. This provides consistency for them in the situation where their teacher has had to quarantine. I know first hand the teacher's routine and classroom. I am able to deliver the instruction from her lesson plans and regularly confer with her regarding our students. This has lessened her stress in the situation knowing that I am there for her and the kids.

According to a fact sheet from the Colorado Department of Education on the 2020 administration of the Teaching and Learning Conditions in Colorado (TLCC) Survey, it "is a statewide survey of school-based staff (teachers and building leadership) on their perceptions of the teaching and learning conditions in their schools." What is glaringly missing from this are Education Support Professionals in direct instructional roles, who have important and insightful perceptions to share.

Without the input of these ESPs, the data is incomplete, and it is critically important that our voice is included. Too often already, our voices are left out of conversations in our schools when it comes to students' learning conditions. Ensuring that ESPs are included in the TLCC will give credence to our experiences and recognition of our role in the teaching and learning conditions so that improvement planning can be deepened in our schools and ensure an opportunity to include and amplify all educator voice. I urge you to support this bill and I thank you for your time.

