

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about a population that is too often invisible in our education system. These are students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) and students who live in group homes and in foster care who may or may not have been identified as having a disability.

There is a systematic breakdown in our educational system that allows services written into the IEP and other support documents to be loosely implemented due to frequent placement changes, school transfers, delays in receiving records, lack of communication between school systems, inconsistent case workers and others that have a direct responsibility for the children. None of these situations are the fault of the child, but the child is being impacted significantly.

Too often, due to confidentiality issues, teachers are unaware that a student is living in a group home or in a foster placement resulting in programs and supports being unavailable to them.

Many of these students are victims of an overloaded system where group home staff change frequently, lack of consistent adult advocates, and case workers who are unable to provide adequate support due to the enormous size of their caseloads.

The long-term consequences are well documented such as lower graduation rates, higher suspension and expulsion rates, increased involvement with the juvenile justice system, and limited post-secondary opportunities.

The bottom line is, these students are legally entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education. We have a moral obligation to protect these students who have the least control over their circumstances. Public schools are often the most stable environment these students have. Investing in proper educational support early reduces long term social and economic costs.

I have experienced firsthand what a child with disabilities can accomplish when given the proper educational opportunities, resources and support.

Thank you,

Peggy Thompson Wimberly

Retired Special Educator, Special Education Department Chair and IEP Chairperson

Henry County Public Schools, Winston Salem Forsyth County Public Schools and  
Baltimore County Public Schools