

Written Testimony of

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Before the Education Committee

SB 977 AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.

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Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Amanda Lynch, I am currently in my tenth year of teaching, the majority of these years have been spent teaching full day kindergarten for the Plainville Public school district.

The 2020/21 school year is proving to be the greatest challenge that all educators have faced. We prepared for this school year differently than any other, thinking about mask breaks, extra hand washing, and the emotional impact the pandemic has had on families. We read the various plans that the administration spent countless hours on. Upon reading the plan in Plainville we found out that we would be doing two jobs, teaching both in person and online through live synchronous lessons. As a result, we learned new technology and attended PD to learn everything we could to make the start of the year possible.

Our school year started with a hybrid model, teachers quickly realized that teaching both in person and livestreaming was not sustainable. Doing two jobs at the same time is impacting the emotional health of teachers and the quality of their teaching. As a result, the academics of students are being put at risk. Teaching both in person and livestreaming is ineffective, as a teacher cannot give 100% to each group. Teachers are feeling like failures.

After one month the district changed from hybrid to full learning. This only proved to be an impossible task. As not all of our students would be returning to the classroom. Now teachers have a larger group of students in person while still being responsible for students at home. When students are not showing up on time, teachers' question, do I make my in person students wait 5 or 10 minutes for the student at home to log on or do I start my lesson and then have to reteach it when the student joins us. In Plainville we are very fortunate to have a wide range of technology available to teachers and students. However, this is not without issues. On an average day, I will have a single lesson interrupted 5 to 6 times for a technology issue, multiple this by a minimum of 5 lessons, the unnecessary interruptions are constant. As a result, lessons need to be retaught in a shorter time frame, students have less time to apply their new skills, teachers have less time to conference with students due to needing to end a lesson and begin another live lesson. When these delays happen the stress level only increases as teachers look at their watch and think okay, now I have to do this in 6 minutes then 4 minutes. These delays and interruptions are impacting the quality of the lessons being delivered. Students at home and at school struggle to learn when so many interruptions and distractions are happening.

For teachers this year the content is the same that they have taught for many years but now they are completely redoing how they teach in order to reach both learners in the classroom and at home. This means changes how learning is presented and how students complete independent work. This is taking

hours each day.

Teachers have taken on this struggle in two ways some teachers are created activities solely for remote students that relate to their in classroom learning. This is stressful and takes the majority of plan time to develop for students and add directions for parents at home. This is being done despite the fact that many independent skills cannot be replicated and authentic at home. Providing feedback to this work has proven near impossible many students are not reading the feedback and teachers are resulting in asking students to stay on meets longer to check in. As a result, the students in the classroom are completely ignored.

Some teachers are choosing to create the same digital assignment for students both at home and in class. However, students do not have a one to one parent to help them in school. They are struggling to complete work in a digital way. As a result, teachers are spending more time teaching students how to use a computer than the actual literacy or math skill at hand. While helping students through their digital struggles we are losing time that could be spent one on one with students conferencing. Many times lessons will conclude with many students not actually completing the assignment and a majority of students not being able to work with the teacher. Students are falling behind academically not because they are not trying, but because they are not able to apply their new learning or meet with teachers.

In the past teachers could always use flexibility in their lessons to provide the best instruction possible. When students would struggle to understand a skill teachers could extend a lesson, pull out extra materials, pull students into small groups, or have students work with peers. Now we are forced to end the lesson as we have a specific time to be live with students. A teacher's ability to make professional decisions have been taken from us.

Daily teachers are being faced with the decision to ignore their students at home or their students in class. This is not manageable and we are losing the attention, engagement, and focus of students.

These examples and feelings are not the feeling of just one teacher but all elementary teachers in the district. The consensus is a majority of teachers feel distraught, unprepared, overwhelmed, ineffective, burnt out, and not heard.

It has been widely publicized that remote learning will not be the same or as good as in person learning. However, by requiring teachers to teach both in person and live at the same time we are now impacting the effectiveness of in person teaching. Students need to receive the best possible instruction from a teacher. The only way that is possible is for students to be present in the classroom.