

From: [Heather Synold \[Ortwein ES\]](#)
To: [Interim Education](#)
Subject: Public Comment: Joint Interim Standing Committee on Education
Date: Wednesday, July 24, 2024 10:39:36 AM

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment today on a matter of utmost importance to our community: the retention of teachers with J-1 visas in our classrooms. My name is Heather Synold, I am a proud Assistant Principal at Ortwein Elementary School in the Clark County School District

I would like to share with you the story of Ms. Lana, a Social-Emotional Teaching and Reinforcement (STAR) teacher who was an invaluable member of our school community. Ms. Lana joined Ortwein Elementary five years ago through the J-1 visa program, bringing with her a passion for teaching and a commitment to our students.

Despite her impact and the deep bonds she formed with students and colleagues, Ms. Lana was forced to leave our community this past May when her five-year J-1 visa expired. Her departure was a loss not only to Ortwein Elementary but also to the broader community she served. The transition will be difficult for our students, who will miss Ms. Lana dearly, and for her colleagues, who relied on her specialized expertise and dedication to some of our most at-risk students.

The current five-year limit on J-1 visas for teachers poses a significant challenge to our ability to retain talented educators like Ms. Lana. These teachers often fill critical roles in schools facing teacher shortages and serve in communities where their skills are desperately needed. When they are forced to leave after five years, it disrupts continuity in education and diminishes the quality of learning experiences for our students.

Currently, there are 20 STAR teaching vacancies in our district and there are 154 Autism teaching vacancies. Both of Ortwein's teachers who serve in classrooms with students with autism are also J-1 visa holders. Unfortunately, we will be saying goodbye to them, also, in the next 2-3 years.

I urge this committee to consider policies that would allow teachers with J-1 visas - those who have uprooted their lives in their home countries to join our school district and serve our students - to remain in our classroom. This will not only benefit our schools but also contribute to the stability and success of our educational system as a whole.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify today. I am hopeful that together, we can work towards solutions that support our teachers, our students, and our communities.

Very truly yours,

Heather M. Synold
Assistant Principal
Dennis Ortwein Elementary