



Hillsboro School District

Student Services Department
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Oregon House Education Committee Hearing
On February 20, 2015
Submitted by Hillsboro School District
RE: HB 2673

Dear Chair Doherty and Members of the House Education Committee:

Hillsboro School District is a district of approximately 20,325 students with 2700 students eligible for special education services. Our department has a clear focus on instruction for all of our students including our most challenged students. We place a strong emphasis on the current federal and state regulations.

We agree with many of the values behind HB 2673's shorter evaluation timeline intended to provide services more quickly to students. We also believe with adequate resources, it would be beneficial for students in some circumstances. In Hillsboro we work with a laser like focus on providing world class instruction and evaluation to all our students, including those eligible for special education services.

HB 2673 requires school districts to complete special education evaluations in 60 calendar days in all cases. In most cases, this change in law would require the evaluations to be completed with an average of 20 days less than with the currently required 60 school days. This reduction in days has several unintended consequences that would significantly impact the ability of our district to provide quality instruction and evaluation. Consider the following information on evaluation timelines:

1. School personnel are not contracted to work on weekends, legal holidays, winter break, spring break or summer break. Districts would need to hire a full array of staff to work over the summer to complete all evaluation related responsibilities. These hard to fill positions are due to the general state and national shortage of special education staff available for employment. Hiring staff for the summer would be difficult if not impossible.
2. Student evaluations frequently have multiple staff involved and require numerous processes such as observation, interviews, etc. Students and parents are often not available during breaks for evaluations and meetings. As a result, evaluations would need to be crammed into a shorter time frame. Rushing the evaluation process would result in poor quality evaluations and not follow best practice models.
3. Students are evaluated in a multitude of environments. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) mandates students have access to general education settings and core instruction. Students evaluated over the summer would not be able to be assessed in their general education settings or in an authentic learning environment. As a result, evaluations conducted could be inaccurate or altogether invalid.



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4. Students particularly impacted by this timeline would be our English Language Learners. HSD has approximately 530 students eligible for both special education English Language Learner services. These dually eligible students often need to be assessed authentically and in an alternate, linguistically appropriate way by specific bilingual staff. Such staff are difficult to find. Frequently alternative forms of assessment take longer than English only assessments. It is crucial for evaluators to carefully assess these students in order to ensure they are not being identified with a disability when their real issue is one of second or third language acquisition.
5. As special education teachers face a truncated timeline, more evaluations will need to be conducted in less time. Since special education teachers routinely administer parts of evaluation themselves, they would be unavailable to teach students, resulting in the loss of valuable instructional time. Furthermore, the resources needed to hire special education staff over the summer will result in decreased numbers of general education staff and instructional time in the general education setting as well increased class sizes.
6. A key piece of qualifying a student for special education is determining if their disability has an educational impact. Many students have disabilities that do not qualify for special education services. The shortened timeline for evaluation would not allow the time necessary for an accurate determination as to whether or not a student has a disability that results in a significant academic impact.
7. Often it is necessary to work with community partners such as medical providers, mental health providers, brokerage services, etc. in order to manage the evaluation process. Community personnel do not work on holidays or weekends and would be difficult to engage in the evaluation process outside of their regular work schedule.

In summary, acceleration the pace of evaluations does not always lead to a quality assessment model. Rushing students into special education without making a sincere effort over time to meet their needs in the general education setting, does not benefit the student or the district. If a more timely evaluation process is needed for some students, the legislature needs to fund this process separately without taking funds already slated for K-12 education. There are not adequate resources in place and districts do not have time between now and June to redesign their evaluation models to extend through summer and all school breaks.



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Consider the following information on the Annual School District Summary of Special Education HB 2673 proposes.

1. Both at the federal and state levels, special education is significantly underfunded. The typical IEP has over 100 requirements and is extremely complicated. Teachers struggle to manage large caseloads of students (in HSD secondary caseloads can exceed 40 students) and adding paperwork to the IEP process overburdens the already significantly overworked special education teachers. More of the instructional time will need to be used to train teachers on new processes and procedures resulting in less time spent working with students who desperately need their teacher's expertise, time and attention. Alternatives to adding a district summary to each IEP could look like a newsletter or posting on the district's website.
2. As HSD works to increase inclusive services to students, the separate report that is proposed on special education sends the wrong message to our community. We are working to include, to empower and to have a whole community of students. Separating special education in a report communicates a value of segregation, not inclusion. It is also unlikely that such a report would increase student achievement or improve college and career readiness for students, including our students receiving special education services.

Sincerely,

Mike Scott
Superintendent
Hillsboro School District

Elaine Fox
Executive Director of Student Services
Hillsboro School District