



SCAPPOOSE SCHOOL DISTRICT

"We prepare our students for the future"

Oregon Senate Education Committee

March 29, 2015

Submitted by the Scappoose SD

Dear Chair Roblan and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

The Scappoose School District is not in support of Senate Bill 560 as we believe that it will have a negative impact on students. Currently, school districts have 60 school days to complete educational evaluations for special education eligibility from the date that the parent provides written consent for that evaluation. This holds true for both initial evaluation and for reestablishing eligibility.

Senate Bill 560 proposes to change from "School Days" to "Calendar Days". It does currently include language that excludes scheduled instructional breaks over 14 calendar days or more. For most school districts, this would mean that all instructional breaks excluding summer would be counted as a part of the 60 days as would weekends.

We do not support this change for the following reasons:

- There are several types of assessments for eligibility that require extensive data collection and needs to be collected from a variety of sources and across different settings. This includes the evaluations for Autism Spectrum Disorder, Emotional Disturbance, Severe Learning Disorders and Intellectual Disabilities.
- Educational Impact is a crucial component of each eligibility category. There are students in all of our schools who have a medically diagnosed disability, but who are not eligible for Special Education Services. All they might be in need of are accommodations and modifications; they are not in need of specially designed instruction. To gather comprehensive data that assists the educational team in teasing out these needs takes time and the opportunity to complete assessments that ensure students are served in the least restrict environment possible.
- Oregon has a critical shortage of all types of specialists that assess and serve students with disabilities. This includes Special Education Teachers, Speech and Language Pathologists, Autism Specialists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and School Psychologists. The limited access to these highly trained individuals currently means that every possible moment of their time needs to be spent serving students. With the shortened time for assessment that is proposed in SB 560, their focus would be shifted into assessment mode rather than service mode, leaving students and districts without access to required services.
- The proposed change to 60 calendar days will also have a negative impact on students. The current system allows specialists the flexibility to ensure that they are getting the most accurate results when they engage in direct assessments of students. If a student is ill, having a difficult day and/or engaged in a highly favored activity, the specialist currently has some flexibility to schedule around that individual student's need.
- Finally, the fiscal impact to districts on the proposed change could be severe. Limited access to specialists could result in districts purchasing extra contract time, hiring private therapists

at increased costs and/or union issues regarding workload. For small and rural districts, such as Scappoose, there is a high likelihood that even if we had the resources to pay for these extra costs, we would be unable to locate the appropriately licensed and trained individual to complete the assessments.

A scenario that illustrates how this proposed change might play out goes as follows:

The team meets and agrees that Bobby should be assessed for Autism Spectrum Disorder. His parents sign permission for the district to assess him on October 1st. Under the proposed change, this evaluation would need to be completed and an eligibility meeting held by November 29th. The evaluation includes these components: Three observations in different settings with a least one of those being interactive, a file review, a functional communication assessment, and an assessment that is specifically looking at Autism. Also needed is information regarding any educational impact that this disability has on Bobby. There are multiple individuals that will complete portions of this evaluation including a Speech Pathologist, Autism Specialist, Teacher, School Psychologist and Occupational Therapist.

Under the proposed change, this evaluation would need to be completed and an eligibility meeting held by November 29th. During these 60 days, there are two non-school days for parent conferences, Veteran's Day and Thanksgiving break. This means that the number of calendar days has been reduced to 54 days. There are also eight weekends, reducing the number of days down to 38 days. In the middle is Halloween, a time of year when most students are not at their best for assessments. Also, during this time Bobby misses two days of school and isn't feeling his best on several other days. We are now looking at about 30 actual days for all of the specialists to meet, assess, write reports and meet again to determine eligibility. Under the current regulation, the eligibility would not need to be completed until January 15th.

In summary, although we agree that each evaluation needs to be completed as expediently as possible, we also believe that accelerating the pace and timeline can lead to evaluations of lesser quality and not allow for us to support the individual needs of our students. Additionally, the impacts on services to students, when hard to find specialists are focused on evaluations rather than service could further negatively impact our most vulnerable students.

Joan Steiner

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