



Tamra Hass
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TO: Senator Education Committee
FR: Tamra Hass, Beaverton SD
RE: SB 560

Dear Chair Senator Roblin and Committee,

Thank you for your attention to children with special needs. Those of us who have dedicated our lives to this population need your advocacy today.

As a speech pathologist/Autism Consultant, I've been working in the area of special education for nearly 20 years. Because my passion is in the field of autism, I also teach graduate courses at Portland State University, specifically in the area of autism and evidence-based practices and assessment.

Today I'm here to express my deep concerns about SB 560 and evaluation time lines. I know the sponsors are well intended, but I want to explain how reducing the number of evaluation days can be detrimental to a student's educational opportunities and ability to reach his or her full social and academic potential.

Specifically, the provision to change the number of days a school district has to complete an initial evaluation or re-evaluation from 60 school days to 60 calendar days.

- The primary goals of conducting an autism spectrum assessment are to determine the presence and severity of a spectrum disorder, develop interventions for educational planning, and collecting data that will help with progress monitoring (*Shriver, Allen, and Matthews, 1999*). The assessment data collected is not only for identification, but also guides educational programming. It is essential to use the evaluation timeline in order to build a clear picture of the child's learning profile. Understanding the student's unique learning profile (strengths and weaknesses), is imperative to best-practice intervention and educational programming.
- A best practice comprehensive developmental assessment is recommended and would include the following: interviews, observation schedules, social behavior, language, communication, adaptive behavior, motor skills, sensory issues, atypical behaviors, and cognitive functioning. (*National Research Council 2001; Ozonoff et al, 2005*). Coordinating practitioners and parents and compiling the assessment data requires time and thoughtful discussion from a multidisciplinary perspective in order to best serve the child.
- Because autism often presents with co-existing disorders, school professionals must administer a comprehensive assessment battery in order to best determine eligibility category, and rule in or rule out any co-morbid disabilities. This takes time and intentional planning with other professionals in order to develop an accurate educational eligibility category.

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- When evaluating for multiple educational categories, we often have multiple evaluators assessing a student. This proposal would require Districts to cram all the assessments into a narrow timeframe, which would not allow for comprehensive evaluations, and the evaluations may not be valid if we are forced to over-test students in a small timeframe.
- Because students are not available, and school staff do not work on weekends, legal holidays or scheduled school breaks (i.e. summer vacation, winter break and spring break), using calendar days instead of school days significantly reduces the number of days staff have access to conduct assessments and student observations, complete file reviews, score assessments, interview staff, interpret results, write evaluation reports and hold eligibility meetings.
- Due to student absences, observations and assessments are frequently rescheduled, because the evaluator does not have access to the student when he or she is absent.
- Because a medical statement is required, and families often do not have insurance or a medical provider, the school must coordinate medical services on behalf of the student. This can take time due to wait lists, organizing doctor visits, and sometimes working to provide transportation for the student and family. In addition, medical providers often do not work on weekends or holidays.
- This proposal does not take into account students that have high rate of mobility and move in and out of multiple schools in a given school year.
- Hypothetically, if a consent to evaluate was signed by parents of student X on December 2, 2014 then the team would only have 32 student contact days (due January 30th), to conduct assessments. Whereas, if the parents of student Y signed a consent on April 2, 2014, the evaluation team would have 40 student contact days to do the assessment.
- Whereas, under current law, regardless of the date of signed consent, the evaluation team has 60 days of student contact time. This promotes equity among student evaluations.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Respectfully Submitted by,

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