

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee:
My name is Jessica Hawkins and I'm the mother of a 9 year old son, Jackson who experiences disability in the form of non verbal autism, ADHD, and an intellectual disability.

My son, Jackson was diagnosed as autistic at the age of 3.5. He attended two years of early intervention prior to beginning kindergarten. He attended kindergarten from 8 am to 2 pm, 5 days a week with no problems.

My son was assigned a modified schedule "due to behavior" at his previous school. He was only allowed to attend for 3 hours per day, four days per week. The staff were often frustrated with his lack of academic progress and willingness to participate. The staff at that school were inadequately trained and the classroom experienced a high turnover. I had one staff member who asked if it was common among autistic children that were my son's age to still not speak. When I requested in writing that my son's schedule be modified so that he could experience a more academic curriculum, rather than behavior driven, it was denied because my son couldn't identify 3 objects that the staff placed in front of him. He experienced a regression in his academic, social and IEP goals during his time at that school.

Because of the lack of training the staff had, the lack of high expectation and pervasive ableism, I've since transferred my son out of that school and district. My son now attends school from 8-2, five days a week. We have now discovered that despite having not been taught to do so at his previous school, he can read and spell words and sentences, as well as do addition and subtraction.

The lack of training created an education program that failed him. The lack of access to academic curriculum due to a limited schedule and belief that he couldn't do work has caused unknown and long term delays in his personal and educational goals. This information may have been detected much sooner, had he had access to full days of school.

My son, Jackson has managed to succeed. He is a success in spite of the obstacles that were placed in front of him. He's become a success because I was able to advocate for him and see what others could or would not see. I ask you to support SB 575 because I don't want to see other children experience these limitations. I don't want their futures impacted by a belief that they can't. I believe in the Least Dangerous Assumption because no one knows what any child's potential can or will be. They all deserve the opportunity to try and reach it.

Thank you, members of the committee for your time