

Submitter: Christie Riehl  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure: SB819

Dear Chair Neron and Committee Members:

As a parent of a recently graduated Special Education student I can attest to the fact that school districts often resort to offering only shortened school days to students with disabilities. This inevitably results in these students being prevented from accessing the educational standards required by IDEA.

I can understand why this happens. However, a solution must be found. In our experience reduced access most often happens when school districts fail to successfully address the behavior support needs of students.

Some students (like my child) have self-injurious and aggressive behaviors that are simply out of their control. They desperately need and deserve help. Shortening school days is a form of punishment as it fails to help these students who can, with the right supports, be successful.

In all too many cases the IDEA mandated evidence-based behavior support plan has not been developed by the school district. This inevitably results in administrators believing that students are unable to be successful in the school setting. If children can't be successful with professional educators how can they possibly be expected to learn at home given that many parents who need to work end up barely able to find childcare?

In order to be successful these support plans must be developed through several hours of direct observation of students as well as interviews with the student, parents and teachers. As important are the qualifications and experience of the behavior support professional with a proven track record. In some cases these plans need to be developed with outside mental health professionals with experience in providing successful treatments for that individual student.

In our child's case Oregon school districts failed to even attempt developing a behavior support plan for years. Unlike many families we had the resources to find outside behavior professionals who did eventually find successful behavior supports. Our adult child is thriving in a way we could have never imagined during their first 18 years. We want other families to find this same hope for their children.

This bill will help reverse the cascading effects of school districts using the tactic of reducing hours instead of addressing the root causes of resorting to shortening

educational hours. My hope is that the Oregon Legislature will help school districts do this through both accountability and the necessary funding for high quality behavior supports. For students who qualify for OHP there is also a mechanism for school districts to utilize this funding to assist in addressing individual student needs.

As many of you know, if challenging behaviors are not addressed when students are younger these behaviors often increase into young adulthood and beyond. This in turn increases the long term costs of supporting adults throughout their lifetime. Investing in school-aged children may be expensive in the short run but the benefits far outweigh these costs - the most important benefit being a significant increase in the quality of life for these vulnerable students and their families.

Thank you for considering this important first step in holding school districts accountable for the illegal and unethical use of shortened school days for special education students.

Sincerely,

Christie Riehl  
Salem