

Written testimony for Public Hearing on SB 1038

Feb. 25, 2011

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the committee;

My name is Julie Giaccone. I am a speech language pathologist (SLP) working in different school districts throughout Connecticut and I'm a member of the CT Speech Language Hearing Association. *I work for CREC on their Special Services Support Team. As such I coordinate the speech and language services for all the CT Technical High Schools, I provide training and technical assistance to schools and districts around the state of CT on how to conduct comprehensive evaluations, how to write measurable standards based IEPs that ensure educational benefit to the student, how to collect and chart accurate data; I evaluation district programs as well as individual student programs and do a great deal of comprehensive evaluations around the state myself. I am also the parent of a child who is deaf who received speech and language services in the public schools.*

I support the IEP task force's mission to improve the IEP process and paperwork, but I am concerned about the wording in Raised Bill 1038 Section 1. (8) (G): which reads;

"The responsible local and regional board of education SHALL DOCUMENT in such child's or pupil's record that such board PROVIDED ASSESSMENTS AND EVALUATIONS USED IN THE DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR SUCH CHILD OR PUPIL TO THE PARENT, GUARDIAN, SURROGATE PARENT OR PUPIL AT LEAST FIVE SCHOOL DAYS BEFORE THE INITIAL PLANNING AND PLACEMENT TEAM MEETING FOR SUCH CHILD OR PUPIL. The parent, guardian, surrogate parent or pupil may waive the requirement that such parent, guardian, surrogate parent or pupil receive such assessments and evaluations at least five school days before the initial planning and placement team meeting by delivering a signed, written waiver to the responsible local or regional board of education. "

Did you know that CSHA, School psychologists, the president of the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education, and a member of the CT OT association signed the minority report opposing this section, which would restrict the timelines for evaluations?

SLP's are listed as a service on more IEPs in CT than any other special education related service, which means we participate in the most number of evaluations, yet SLP's work in the #1 SHORTAGE area in the schools, according to the State Dept. of Education. Many public schools now use contract companies to staff their districts, as it is very difficult to find SLPs to work in the schools. The role of the typical school based SLPs has both broadened and deepened with the implementation of SRBI, and all our other school duties. Our caseload is heavy, so we need as much time as possible to conduct multi-component, comprehensive evaluations. This evaluation process includes; an integration of records review, teacher interviews, observations in different school settings, collection and analysis of language samples, analysis of work samples, parental input /interviews, and standardized testing, across listening, talking and reading domains.. This in depth evaluation process is necessary so that we can accurately diagnose, and thereby design, effective interventions and treatment. But because these evaluations are multidisciplinary, often more than one professional is testing the student – this results in different disciplines on the IEP fighting for limited time with child.

Multidisciplinary evaluations also require ALL the related services professionals on the student's IEP to meet to discuss their results COLLABORATIVELY, prior to report writing. Gathering the team together at the same time to do this requires flexibility in scheduling, hard to find in schools, as many SLPs work in several buildings in the district. Some work part time. These SLPs can't imagine any narrowing of the timelines for evaluations. Most of the time we're successful in meeting timelines, but factors that may cause us to miss, and are beyond any evaluator's control, include;

weather related school delays/closures (this winter was terrible and we are scrambling to catch up!), sick students or staff, parents taking their children on vacation during school time, and mandated limits to when students can be pulled from the classroom – these realities interfere with getting every evaluation done on time, despite our best efforts and intension.

I also supervise Graduate Students and Clinical Fellow, to help train future school based SLP as many of my school colleagues do. We take on this additional responsibility to support the next generation of our profession. This leads to additional supervision for the report writing process. The back and forth editing / revision requires additional time beyond what a veteran SLP would typically require to complete a comprehensive evaluation. Shortening the evaluation timelines would cause veteran SLP's to not take on Graduate students and CFY students. So Clinical Fellows have to complete their CFY year in a medical setting, where they MIGHT STAY once finished. This situation ADDS to the chronic SLP shortage in the schools. With the current work load and SLP shortage, many Clinical Fellows who complete their school CFY, LEAVE the school setting to work in the medical settings which do not suffer stressful timelines and are considered easier work settings.

By shortening the time we have to conduct these evaluations, you impede the thoroughness of the testing and report writing process, which leads to less effective intervention. Not making progress is often a Due Process issue.

Although I am an SLP, I am also a parent of a child who received speech and language services. I depended on the SLP to conduct thorough, comprehensive evaluations and to provide reports that accurately diagnosed my child's core deficits so appropriate, effective specialized instruction could be provided. I would NOT have wanted my child's evaluation process watered down in any way.

Please support SLPs in the schools by using the language on timelines from IDEA, as the State Department of Education wants to do. It allows more evaluation time than the proposed time line language in SB 1028.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have as you work on this legislation.

Sincerely,

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