

Testimony re: SB 1038, an Act Concerning Individualized Education Programs
Before the Education Committee
February 28, 2011
Submitted by: Michelle Bidwell, parent

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Bidwell and I am here today as the parent of three children with disabilities who all require special education. I'm here today to only talk about some of the language in the first sections of the proposed bill: Section 10-76d, Section 1(a)(8)(B), and (8)(G).

Both sections identify that the "local or regional board of education" will only offer to meet with parents to discuss evaluations prior to the "initial evaluation" and will document "in the pupil's record" that the board provided these evaluations to the parent or guardian "at least five school days before the initial planning and placement team meeting for such child or pupil".

The language in the proposed bill strips parents of the right to receive copies of any evaluation done on our children after the initial evaluation and the right to meet with PPT team members to review any of these evaluations, prior to any PPT meeting other than the "initial" PPT meeting to determine eligibility.

What this language says is that local or regional boards of education will only have to provide evaluation reports prior to the initial evaluation for special education. And that local and regional boards of education will never again have to provide parents of children already identified for special education (i.e. for triennial re-evaluations, or any other type of evaluation) with the reports of these evaluations prior to any planning and placement team meeting other than the initial planning and placement team meeting to determine eligibility for special education.

Section (8)(B) talks about local and regional boards of education being required to "offer" for parents to "meet with members of the planning and placement team to discuss the evaluation reports prior to the initial planning and placement team meeting for the sole purpose of discussing the findings..... and reports received by the parents". What this language really says is that local or regional boards of education will never again have to meet (or offer to meet) with parents prior to any planning or placement team meeting, other than the "initial" meeting, to discuss the evaluation reports for our children to determine eligibility.

Certainly the intent of this proposed bill cannot be to strip parents or guardians of the right to review reports of evaluations on our children prior to any PPT meeting other than the "initial" meeting to determine eligibility. If this bill is passed with the language "as is", what will happen is that, at PPT meetings, when parents are handed reports of evaluations they've never seen before, parents will be forced to request that the PPT meeting end and be rescheduled to allow the parent to review the report and participate

equally in the PPT meeting. How can the parent be an equal participant in a planning and placement team meeting, as required by federal law, if they are denied the data and information they need prior to the PPT meeting that is available to all other PPT members?

This language, referring to “initial” identification” and “initial PPT” must be changed. It is clearly an error that must be corrected. The wording of this current proposed bill is a giant step backwards for our state!!!! The language in this section must be changed to require school districts to ALWAYS provide parents or guardians with copies of any evaluation data or reports at least 5 school days prior to any PPT meeting. As far as “offering to meet” with parents prior to the PPT meeting, I think it’s fine to “offer” this only prior to the initial PPT meeting (although, frankly, I’ve met numerous times with school district staff prior to a PPT meeting to discuss evaluation data—this seems to be a standard practice but this could/would cease with the passage of this bill with the current language) but the actual reports of all assessments must be provided to all parents or guardians at least 5 school days prior to all PPT meetings.

The language in this section of the proposed bill requires many changes. I strongly urge you to consider my comments and that the current language will strip school districts of a duty that is currently required and will severely restrict parents as equal participants at any planning and placement team meeting after the “initial” planning and placement team meeting..

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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