

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee

My name is Joan McNulty. I am VP for Planning for the Connecticut Speech, Language, Hearing Association as well as a recently retired public school Speech-Language Pathologist.

I am speaking to you today concerning SB 1038, Section 1. (8) (G) and the proposed recommendation for the provision of assessments and evaluations used to determine eligibility for special education to parents or guardians five days prior to the initial planning and placement meeting as well as the time line for the waiver.

The State Department of Education has aligned its timeline regulations in accordance with the already stringent Federal guidelines of 60 days from the date of referral to the determination of eligibility meeting.

I appreciate the need for parents to be informed about the results of assessments and evaluations before participating in a meeting involving their child's future and I am aware of the overwhelming amount of data, technical language, and the number of involved personnel that are part of the PPT meeting. Many parents have expressed their concerns about this part of the process. It is certainly best practice to provide access to the completed evaluation reports prior to the meeting and this does occur whenever possible and should always be encouraged.

The recommendation to shorten the timeline in order to provide premeeting reports is laudable in concept but unmanageable in practice.

The responsibilities of special education personnel are wide and widening as a result of the additional classroom support necessary to implement SRBI as well as staff shortages in these crucial durational shortage areas. The addition of delivering a signed, written waiver while excusing the presence of the report adds another layer of administrative detail to be attended to by those working to complete the evaluations.

With a team consisting of between three and six evaluators, the access to a student becomes a logistical headache with weather delays, CMT testing, and vacations further impacting the timeline. A new paper timeline will doubtlessly affect the amount of direct services available to all students.

The assessment/evaluation of a student requires time not only to administer test batteries, but also for observations, teacher and parent interviews, and a thoughtful analysis of the data, in order to develop accurate diagnoses and intervention planning. It is not something best achieved within a limited timeline. If our purpose is to assess a student's needs and plan for the best possible program, a hurried process, while it may accommodate certain concerns, does not, in my professional opinion, benefit the student.

May I urge you to give careful consideration to the unintended consequences of this proposed legislation.