

SUFFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

350 Mountain Road, Suffield, Connecticut 06078
860-668-3800

Karen M. Berasi
Superintendent of Schools

Brian Hendrickson
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction

Natalie Donais
Director of Special Services



March 16, 2017

Dear Representatives of the Education Committee,

I am writing to you as Superintendent of the Suffield Public Schools; however the better part of my career, 43 years, has been devoted to providing services to special education students in public schools, private practice, and at the university level. I fully understand the difficult job you have before you and the responsibility you carry every day on behalf of the children of Connecticut. Your time, deep thought and efforts are appreciated.

We share concern for students with disabilities. The public schools of Connecticut can be proud of the substantial programming that is provided to students with disabilities. From the time I came to the great state of Connecticut in 1999 to teach as clinical faculty at UConn, I was impressed with the high level of services provided to Pre-K - 12 special education students while at the same time shocked at the amount of special education litigation in this state and the preponderance of regulations that contribute to a "we versus them" mentality.

This letter addresses H.B. No. 7252 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN ADJUDICATION PROCESS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND THE RIGHT OF PARENTS TO OBSERVE THEIR CHILD AT SCHOOL.

While I know the legislature has good intent, the amount of observation time you are proposing with essentially free access to school personnel is disruptive to the educational process. While serving as Superintendent in Suffield, observation policies were developed through the Board of Education process to ensure that the disruptive nature of lengthy observations and unlimited conversations and

interviews with personnel would cease to negatively impact the learning for the vast majority of the students in classrooms.

Our responsibility is to provide for the common good. From my experiences as Director of Special Services in Ridgefield and Superintendent in Suffield, giving unlimited time to parents and evaluators in the classroom impacts the quality of education for the entire classroom including the student being observed. Teachers request that administration support them and their students by providing reasonable guidelines, procedures, and time limitations. Teachers, psychologists, specialists, and paraprofessionals want to instruct their children as best they can. Taking highly qualified teachers and staff away from their students to accompany parents on observations and provide interviews for parents and outside evaluators during instructional time is actually taking away the right of an appropriate education for the majority of students.

In my 15 years of service in Connecticut, there have been 5 families who have persisted at requesting the need for unlimited access. In addition to a reasonable amount of observation time, these families were offered multiple ways to learn more about their child from videotaping to parent trainings to frequent meetings to discuss the instructional data. While I hear the fears of this minority of families, the fear is not based in the reality of the school environment.

In my experience the public schools of Connecticut offer students with disabilities *far more* than an appropriate education, while public schools are not and were never intended to be a clinical boutique setting. Private evaluators should not be permitted to take instructional time away from children in the public schools. Lengthy interviews should occur after school hours with the consent of school employees at the expense of the evaluator or parent. Please allow highly qualified certified public school educators to educate all children to the best of their abilities and determine individually for each child the amount and type of observations needed, as they are the experts in education.

I am grateful for your time and consideration and wish you well as you work to meet the expectations of all your constituents.

Respectfully,
Karen M. Berasi

