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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

School Psychology Department

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The School Psychology department of the Central Dauphin School District, Harrisburg, PA has significant concerns regarding the wording of the final draft of Chapter 14 special education regulations. Our specific concern is in relation to new language inserted in this final copy for Section 14.123, page 19 regarding Evaluations. The change from 60 school days to 60 calendar days made only in this last version does not really have the student's best interest at heart. Our reasons are multi-faceted.

1. Pennsylvania has added Response to Intervention (RTI) as a method of determining a specific learning disability. The whole premise of that system is to move a struggling child through a tiered system of regular education support to find strategies that will help that child succeed. Multiple data points are needed prior to changing programs. Each data point requires a certain amount of additional instruction to determine its effectiveness. Prior to and during the evaluation process, many education interventions are in place. By shortening the time for those programs to prove their effectiveness, you are not necessarily making qualitative changes to benefit children. Having calendar days as the standard will not allow the RTI system to be properly implemented. RTI requires a great deal of documentation that takes time to compile.
2. The financial burden to the taxpayers throughout the state will be enormous as any district's current staff of Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists and School Psychologists will be unable to meet the evaluation demands as well as provide the required services as indicated in the IEPs on their caseload. The financial demands and professional emphasis on speed of evaluations will not be tied to increased student achievement. Districts will have less flexibility in their financial prioritizing as they focus on increasing student success, a priority educational mandate. Support personnel would have less time available to deliver service if more time will need to be devoted to completing evaluations quicker.
3. Districts at times struggle to find service providers under current conditions. Colleges are not graduating an adequate number of therapists to serve the state at these proposed levels. There is insufficient time to train the staff that will be needed. It will take multiple years to have adequate support personnel throughout the State, particularly in less populated areas of the State.
4. As psychologists, we are not the sole author of Evaluation Reports and Re-evaluation Reports but we are the one responsible for the summary section. Because it is a multidisciplinary evaluation, it is not always possible to expedite each "discipline" to meet a calendar day timeline. The amount of pressure that

will be placed on professionals to meet this new "rush to completion" mandate will surely sacrifice the quality of the evaluation teams' work. If we are simply looking for quick test numbers and brief assessments then we should be looking at computer generated tests that can be completed individually and then scored almost immediately. If we are asking for the team of professionals to analyze data and consider assessment scores and progress monitoring efforts, we need to provide a timeline that allows for the work to be completed accurately, thoughtfully and correctly. If student success is our goal, then we should not be forcing an end product to satisfy the anxiety level of parents. With the current 60 school days timeline, we are actually able to make curriculum changes and modifications during the evaluation process that ultimately supports student success.

5. Teachers of life skills support students would have every student potentially in need of a re-evaluation every two years. With reduced time lines in the proposed legislation, maintaining an individualized teaching load and yearly IEP updating, including a component of 60 calendar days for completion of re-evaluations will take more time from their primary duty of instructing children.
6. Support staff such as psychologists, etc. can be used effectively in consultation with teachers, supporting their work with students with social, emotional, instructional and behavioral concerns. Consultation is a role that builds staff capacity to meet the needs of all students. Restricting psychologists to testing/placing duties reduces collaborative opportunities.
7. At the secondary level a single student could be working with upwards of 8 teachers a day. To obtain reliable information from all of these is quite difficult and time consuming. Lessening the time to complete our work will affect the thoroughness of evaluations and diminish the ability to put effective alternative strategies in place to promote student achievement and sound mental health.
8. More complicated cases, such as when evaluation of a child suspected of having Autism/Asperger's, multiple disabilities, or students in need of a psychiatric evaluation and functional behavioral data. These components require extra time to complete. By decreasing the time available to evaluate and gather information, inaccurate or incomplete diagnoses may result.
9. As written in this final draft, the running of calendar days does not stop until summer recess. For a child signed, perhaps November 19th of this year, by January 18th there would have been 34 school days to complete an evaluation with weekends and holidays, both Thanksgiving and Christmas. That is a very busy time of year with holiday rehearsals and excitement. To evaluate children in that time frame is not always productive and accurate. However, such data will have to be obtained no matter what the extenuating circumstances. Such results may then be tainted, leaving the school team to question their accuracy. Breaks in schedule due to winter weather also arise more frequently in some parts of the state than others. Again, no consideration for these emergencies is made in the current reading of the proposed law changes.

Based upon our strong desire to do what is right by the children and parents in our district, we strongly urge lawmakers to delete the hastily added, but highly significant proposed change to Chapter 14, Section 14.123 change regarding Evaluation time lines. Is decreasing the time line from school days to calendar days really an attempt to improve student outcomes or to satisfy lobbying groups? Please reconsider for the educational success of the students in the Central Dauphin School District, as well as, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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