

1/17/17

To: Senate Education Committee Chair Philip Baruth,

Re: SBE rulemaking authority

Dear Chairman Baruth, and Committee members,

I apologize that I am unable to offer testimony in person or by phone. My work related duties make that impossible for me. However, I do wish to offer my input, as your Committee takes another look at the SBE proposed changes to the rule 2200 series.

I am a proponent of school choice.

I am the parent of a child with special learning needs. I am a school board member of a non-operating town, therefore tuitioning all of our students. I am a physical therapist with a pediatric concentration. I've worked with students in many schools, in Vermont and elsewhere, as well as outside of schools. In short, I'm quite familiar with the Special Education system.

I have heard the argument that school choice works against students with special needs, as independent and private schools are not obligated to accept all students, nor offer special education services to all students with special education needs. I have experienced only positive outcomes with the two independent schools my child has attended.

My child attended public school grades K - 6. At that point, she really needed an extra year. To remain in public school would have required moving on to 7th grade within a student population that had already pigeon-holed her, or sending her to a more distant public school which would have been a transportation nightmare for us. We have school choice. I was able to interview staff at various schools, observe teaching strategies, and choose the school that could best meet my child's special learning needs. When it came time for high school, I had the same opportunity to determine which school could best meet my child's needs. As a result, she attends an independent school that has a well developed special education department. Because Independent schools have flexibility in building their educational programs, the Special Education team was able to build a program that truly best suited the needs of its special learner population. Therefore, my child's needs were met from the first day. I did not have to constantly work with the school to be sure that the team was teaching in the way that my child needed to learn. This was exactly what I was doing when she attended the public school!

My child is succeeding, learning skills she actually needs, not forced by Common Core to learn skills and material of no benefit to her. Her confidence is constantly expanding. She's taking on new challenges, and I have real reason to believe that she'll eventually achieve independence in work and in living skills. This would not have happened if I had not been able to choose the school that could best meet her needs, which just happens to be an independent school.

As a physical therapist, I've worked with several students through the years who attend schools in the public school system. As with all students, the strengths and needs of each student varies. Some of the

schools meet special education needs beautifully, due to overall teaching philosophy of the school staff, and the skill level of the teachers. Some schools and staff are simply ill equipped to meet the needs of some special education students. These students flounder, or at best stagnate, while parents struggle to get their child's needs met. The process of determining that a special learner's needs would be best met outside of the designated public school in that child's district is exhausting and time consuming. I have seen many times that the parents have the strongest intuition about how their child learns best, and should be able to choose the educational program that best helps their child achieve the maximum level of independence possible for that child. Sometimes that program is delivered at an independent school.

The SBE proposed rule changes would result in some, perhaps many, independent schools having to abide by the same restrictive rules as public schools, particularly in regards to how the Special Education program is implemented. Many independent schools would be unable to meet the proposed rules, and would therefore be forced to accept only privately tuitioning students. This would severely restrict or eliminate school choice, (those schools would no longer be a choice), for many students. Due to decreased enrollment, some of those independent schools would be forced to close. In the case of Burr and Burton in particular, this would eliminate the school that most high school students in its catchment area attend, including students with special needs.

Again, I strongly support school choice. I feel parents are, most times, best equipped to determine which educational program will best meet the learning needs of their children. I urge the Committee to restrict the SBE rule making authority in regards to independent schools.

Respectfully,

Siobhan Eddy Young
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