

From: Shannon Newell <vtschoolpsych@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 21, 2022 11:07 AM
To: Daphne Kinney-Landis <dkinneylandis@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: [External] House Bill 716

[External]

Good Morning Daphne,

My name is Shannon Newell and I am currently a member of the Vermont Association of School Psychologists and am the delegate for the state of Vermont to the National Association of School Psychologists. I am writing because I know that the Senate Education Committee has been taking testimony on House Bill 716. I believe that members of VCSEA are testifying tomorrow. As school psychologists, we will be the critical members of the team who will be assisting with the decision making regarding eligibility for special education services. If after hearing from VCSEA the Senate Education Committee would like to hear from additional members of the field, I would be happy to testify on behalf of VASP. I did send the email below to the senators on the committee. If there is anything else I can do to be of assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out.

The Vermont Association of School Psychologists has recently spoken with the House Education Committee and we are writing in support of House Bill 716 to delay the implementation of 2362 and 2362.2.5 given the extensive training that will be needed to prepare the field for the implementation of these changes. Not only will the field require guidance from the Agency of Education regarding how they would like districts and schools to implement the changes, what documentation will be needed, what procedures must be followed, etc. but individuals, including the members of the Evaluation and Planning Teams, will need breadth and depth training regarding the different methods that have been outlined in the rule changes. Although the changes were adopted and provided to the field around September/October 2021, training for the field has not been well established or widely provided. These are very different methods for determining eligibility than have been used in the past and if we want to ensure equity and consistency in the identification of students with a disability, it is critical that the individuals expected to carry out the evaluations have the appropriate training. We believe that in collaboration with the Agency of Education, we only now have a better understanding of the training needs across the state. This is not training that can be accomplished with one-hour informational webinars or one-day workshops. These changes are effectively systemic changes that require new resources and procedures at the administrative, general education, and special education levels.

Furthermore, while there may have been discussion regarding the need for the approved changes over the course of several years, individuals trained in the identification of students with disabilities (e.g. school psychologists) were not a part of that conversation, were not involved in writing the special education rules, and were not informed of the rule changes until they became public in September/October 2021. We believe that this lack of communication and involvement has impacted the understanding of what would be necessary to effectively implement the approved changes in the original timeframe. Had the conversations occurred during the rule

change period, feedback and guidance could have been provided regarding the resources and training that would be needed.

Lastly, we understand that parents and advocates are anxious for the changes to go into effect as they have advocated for these changes for quite some time. However, in an effort to ensure equity and consistency across the state, we believe that implementing these changes prematurely (e.g. before people are adequately trained) will only work to increase the inequities that exist in our educational system and will result in greater inconsistencies in the decision-making process. Poor implementation has the potential to harm our students during a time when the mental health of students is already of concern.

The Vermont Association of School Psychologists applauds the rule changes and believes that these are necessary in order for us to better align with best practices in the identification of students with disabilities. However, we also want to ensure that the practices that are being put in place are done so thoughtfully and are not rushed. Again, while some may have been aware that the changes were occurring, many of the individuals responsible for implementation have not had the same amount of time to adequately prepare for the changes. Thank you, we are happy to discuss this with you further.

Vermont Association of School Psychologists

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