

Julie Olsen
Cumberland
LD 1098

Dear Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am writing to provide testimony on LD 1098: An Act to Ensure Equal Access to a Full School Day for All Students. My name is Dr. Julie Olsen, and I am the Director of Instructional Support in MSAD 51. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective on this important topic and legislation.

Given my role, expertise, and experiences, I am opposed to this bill

The use of abbreviated school day is already highly regulated in Maine Unified Special Education Regulations (MUSER) to include:

- (a) Address how the child will meet the system of learning results (which may include a core of standards in English language arts and mathematics for kindergarten through grade 12 established in common with other states), and receive full access to the general curriculum and services on the IEP, as determined by the individual child's need;
- (b) Address how the child will participate in local and statewide assessments;
- (c) Develop a revised IEP with a re-entry plan for the child to return to a full-time school day within a reasonable period of time, no longer than 45 calendar days; and,
- (d) Delineate in the revised IEP with the re-entry plan the actions the SAU will take to assist the child to participate in a full day of school; and
- (e) Document in the Written Notice the basis for the determination of an abbreviated school day and how the determination is based on the individual needs of the child.

It is important to point out that, if any student has not returned to a full day within the 45 calendar days, MUSER requires that the IEP team, which includes the parent, meet every 20 school days to review the student's progress and setting. Current special education regulations prohibit the use of an abbreviated school day as a form of discipline or punishment.

In our district, parents are present at nearly 100% of every IEP meeting. We would always include a parent in every abbreviated day conversation and decision. We rarely order an abbreviated school day but when we do it is a necessary and thoughtful decision. In the field of special education, decisions about school day length are taken very seriously, our parents are always involved, our plans are reviewed regularly, and the decisions are grounded in student data and progress. We are always striving and working towards full day programming.

If passed, I worry that this bill could lead to more restrictive placements for students. IEP teams could potentially be forced to consider out-of-district placements if they are unable to consider abbreviated day options to stabilize student programming. In MSAD 51, when we have a student placed on an abbreviated day, we often staff the student with more staff than when a student is placed in the full day programming in order to ensure safe, appropriate academic and behavioral programming. Abbreviated school day decisions are never made due to being short staffed. Being on an abbreviated day allows students to build confidence and success, improve their engagement in school, build positive school habits, and demonstrate less interfering behaviors.

Given that the abbreviated school day is already extremely regulated in MUSER, parents are currently highly involved in the IEP process, and students are able to benefit from an abbreviated school day that is monitored through the IEP process, I urge you to oppose this bill.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration on behalf of our students.