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Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

Participation in hundreds of IEP Team meetings in my 40 years of School Psychology practice within Maine public schools, has afforded me a seasoned perspective.

The IEP process is one of discovering, defining, appreciating and articulating a child's level of functioning, their strengths and needs. Based on the multidisciplinary data, the IEP Team can then collectively make informed decisions regarding identification, level and type of services provided etc.

A professional who has provided regular and direct special education services to a child is an important participant, a voice to be heard within the IEP Team. I have found specific and valuable information about a child's functional performance from the special educator (learning preferences, attitudes, approaches) and the methods used or adapted to ensure success for that child; data not typically measured in a formal assessment.

In terms of changes to the IEP, the Team should reach consensus. If there is a disagreement among team members, this becomes the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion about what is best for the student. In my experience, when the IEP Team has pressed the pause button, committed to actively listening and hearing all perspectives, remained open-minded, flexible, and creative, the student is best served. Time spent at this juncture in the process has resulted in significant benefits; a sense of shared decision-making, a more collaborative, solution-seeking process between the school and parents and savings of thousands of legal dollars.

I support LD 552, An Act to Strengthen the Individualized Education Program Process.

Thank you,

Suzanne S. Jones