

HB714- Special Education – Learning Continuity Plan – Requirement

Assigned to: Ways and Means Committee

February 10, 2021

**Position: Favorable**

Hello, my name is Kalani Brown and I am a proud mom of a 9-year-old with developmental disabilities who attends second grade in Montgomery County Public Schools. When COVID 19 forced the schools to close, my son did not start attending schools for two weeks. After two weeks and until the end of the year, he only had about ½ hours of school a day. This was not nearly enough to support his learning and the academic progress that he had made during the year. For math, he was supposed to attend an asynchronous math lesson and complete homework. The lesson was very difficult for him to follow, so I ended up watching the lesson and then teaching it to him. Very little of his supports, accommodations, modifications listed on his IEP were followed. His related service hours for OT and Speech were non-existent until we advocated for him to continue to receive them. We were able to get one 20-minute session for OT and for speech although his IEP stated that he was to receive two 30-minutes sessions of OT and three 30-minute sessions of Speech. Many of my friends with children with developmental disabilities did not even get this. The Fall fared much better although, again, many of the modifications, supports and accommodations, although listed on his IEP Distance Learning Plan, were lacking or non-existent even though we once again advocated for them. We were told that it is very hard in a virtual environment. It has been difficult for my son. He went from loving school and being excited to go to school, to every morning saying that he didn't want to go to virtual school.

Our school was fairly quick about putting together a distance learning plan but did not include us much in the changes, especially when the pandemic first hit. When asked about related services, we were told that the it would be not provided as the direction for these had to come from central administration. We felt that this plan was wholly inadequate to meet the needs of our son. The distance plan in the Fall encompassed almost everything on his IEP prior to the pandemic but the follow-through was dismal. The supports that he had in the classroom were not provided in the virtual environment.

I strongly believe that planning for unexpected events like the pandemic would have made the transition much easier for my son. Parents must be a part of the planning as they know their child best. Most parents are not educators and virtual schooling has placed them in a role that they are not accustomed to. They need guidance and support to help their child be successful in a new environment. Additionally, changes and adjustments to the IEP must only occur with the parent's input and consent.

COVID 19 posed many challenges for everyone, but I firmly believe that planning for potential emergencies is a must, especially for vital services, such as education, serving our vulnerable populations.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this very important bill. I very much hope that you will support it.

Sincerely,

Kalani Brown

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