

SB209- Special Education - Prolonged School Closure - Extension of Education Services
Assigned to: Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
January 27, 2021

My name is Kim Tart. I live in District Heights, Maryland, Prince George's County, with my husband Willie and 12-year-old son Montgomery "Monty". Monty has Down syndrome and attends Kettering Middle School, community based-instruction (CBI) program. Monty is a curious and smart seventh grader who enjoys playing drums. He has aspirations of becoming a chef and a landscaper.

I respectfully ask for your support of SB209- Special Education - Prolonged School Closure - Extension of Education Services. This bill would require a county board of education to offer and provide to certain disabled and special education students (whose schools are subject to a prolonged school closure) the option to continue attending school or receiving education services after the student's anticipated graduation date. It would require a county board to provide a notice to the parents or guardians of eligible students about a student's option to continue attending school or receiving certain education services.

When schools are closed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, educators implemented an Individualized Continuity of Learning Plan (ICLP) for special education students. ICLPs were developed in response to the fact that the entirety of student IEPs could not be implemented during this crisis. The ICLP indicated the student's most critical learning needs, and how the needs would be addressed. All in-person therapy sessions were changed to a consultative model. A limited number of students received virtual therapy or speech. Parents had no input buy-in or decision making regarding the development or implementation of the ICLP. Parents were informed that once the school system is able to resume regular programming, the services outlined in the IEP will be implemented in their entirety. The IEP team will also reconvene to review your child's levels of performance or needs and make appropriate revisions to the IEP when school resumed. All Community Based Instruction (CBI) trips were cancelled.

CBI is educational instruction in naturally occurring community environments. It provides students with "real life experiences." The goal of CBI is to provide hands on learning opportunities to help students acquire the skills used in the world today on a regularly scheduled basis. CBI is designed to provide natural teaching opportunities for daily living skills practice. Concepts and skills are introduced in the classroom and then applied and practiced in natural environments in the community using CBI.

When the 2020/21 school year commenced, we were directly involved in developing Monty's IEP goals/objectives and ensured that all the related services (speech and occupational therapy) would continue in a virtually format. Monty is receptive and responsive during most sessions. Sadly, Kettering Middle School did not provide CRI learning materials until January 2021. The materials provided were limited to a calculator, a package of index cards, one black marker, counting blocks, plastic chips and geometric shapes. Fortunately, we have materials (manipulatives, calculator) and learning tools to assist Monty.

Although CBI trips were cancelled, Kettering Middle schools offers virtual field trips to the zoo and museums. Most children with disabilities are tactile, visual and conceptual learners. They benefit more participating in hands-on, in person activities. Monty and his fellow students have missed an entire year of that valuable experience. Thus, so many missed opportunities to develop or enhance life skills. Skills we all take for granted – going to the bank, mailing a letter, preparing meals, grooming habits, buying items at a store or interviewing for a job. It has placed the students in a disadvantage in comparison to their typical peers.

This bill will close the gap and allow students to acquire valuable practical skills to properly transition from high school. Most importantly, to be as independent as possible. The option to extended time and services to students transitioning from high school would be a blessing to parents and the students. Transitioning from high school is an exciting time for young adults and their families as they consider options for the future. High school CRI programs offer teachings and practical activities (ex. field trips, life skill instruction) that help youth and their families navigate a path toward a productive and meaningful life as an adult.

People with developmental disabilities need supports to obtain and maintain work in the community, advance in their chosen field, and explore new employment options as their skills, interests, and needs change. Transitioning youth can work and contribute to their community when given opportunity, training, and supports that build upon their unique talents, skills, and abilities. Youth should strive to be fully participating members of their community, to include earning a living wage, and engaging in work that is compatible with their vision of a "good life.

Remember, adults with disability are valuable citizens and they vote - their votes count.

It is important that the timeline for connecting to an adult services provider should be extended as well so that students who delay their exit from high school still have a full year to make the transition to adult services upon their exit from high school for a smooth transition.

I wish to thank the committee for their concern for the health and wellbeing of transitioning youth with disabilities. I hope that the bill is passed to ensure students with disabilities who were impacted significantly by the pandemic, are not left behind.

Thank you very much for your kind attention

Sincerely,

Kim G. Tart

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