

Dear Richardson and Committee Members,

My name is Amanda Collins and I live in Shoreview, district 42A. I am writing to request your support of HF 965 / SF 1210 in support of recovery education for students who have disabilities.

My child was provided with a generic IEP adjustment in the spring and summer of 2020 that did not take into account any individualized plan. The adjustments for the school year 20/21, while a little more individualized, removed the majority of direct and indirect services for PT, OT, hearing impaired, DAPE, and speech. He currently only receives 15 minutes of speech services a week and periodic email check ins on goals from the remaining specialists. He has been able to obtain time each day with either a special education teacher and para, but again greatly reduced from the hours that he would have received had he been in school in person.

Materials provided on a daily basis for his inclusive classroom live and on your own sessions are provided without any para support that would have occurred within school to make the necessary accommodations to allow him to access the lessons with his class. His IEP included a 1:1 para. That 1:1 full time para responsibility has fallen on us. This requires us to spend at least 30 minutes every morning reviewing all videos and lesson instructions and assess how best to accommodate and teach him the content for the day. Luckily I am working from home and have some flexibility to work evenings and weekends to make up hours I spend with him each day, along with having support 3 days a week from his grandmother. Without our support and coverage over the full school day he would not be able to access any of his lessons.

The only reason distance learning is working for my child is because we have created an at home plan with full time coverage by a family member to act as his full time para to allow him to access virtual school. This has at times required me to take vacation hours so that he had coverage for all live meetings and assistance for all on your own assignments. Our family not only has taken on the responsibility of his para, but have also had to cover the gaps in PT/DAPE, OT, and speech work on a weekly basis. We have also had to act as a sign language interpreter. His IEP included training his team on his frequently used ASL words and phrases. With the move to distance learning in the fall none of this was done which until he recently received a BAHA device required us to repeat and sign instructions to him and interpret his signed replies to questions. We are hoping the state will implement guidance to reduce the burden on individual families from filing and managing individual complaints with districts through the state.

My student needs time with PT/DAPE, OT, and speech therapists to work on goals that they have not spent any time with him on during this school year. He also needs individual learning opportunities with a special education teacher or para to work on gaps that have been created in his readiness for the next grade because of the virtual platform and reduction in the hours they planned to spend with him this year.

While he may not appear behind in some areas because he is close to meeting some of his current year goals, his lack of hours with his team has caused him to fall behind in other areas of learning that were not written as specific goals in his IEP because they were areas that would have been covered by his access to an inclusive classroom and full time para. Even with any extra hours or support over the rest of the school year and summer his team has already agreed that he will likely not be ready to move into 1st grade next year. If we repeat a grade to set him up for success as he moves through school we will be giving up a year on the end of his education journey which is not fair to him, but pushing him ahead when he is not ready because the school failed him during COVID, also is not fair to him.

Thank you for your leadership. Please support HF 965 / SF 1210.

Amanda Collins, mother to a Kindergarten son with disabilities