

# WAPSD

*Wyoming Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities*

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December 16, 2011

Select Committee on Stateside Education Accountability  
c/o Hank Coe  
Box 1088  
Cody, WY 82414

RE: Implementation of the Teacher Accountability Act

Dear Mr. Coe,

The Wyoming Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities shares the desire that excellent, and cost effective, education be provided to our children. We understand that the proposed legislative changes addressing teacher evaluation and accountability strive to meet this goal. The WAPSD strongly supports the concept of teacher accountability. We do however have several concerns related to possible unintended consequences affecting a group of constituents we have in common.

The accountability initiative may result in a system that encourages competitiveness rather than cooperation, and values extrinsic, individual reward over shared successes. Improperly mandated educational accountability has enormous potential to negatively impact classroom climate, as well as school and district performance. Wyoming stakeholders-- students, parents, and educators-- have provided comments to WAPSD panel members about what some of these potentially harmful consequences may be.

One concern is that building leaders and teachers will claim that having students with disabilities in their schools and classrooms will have a detrimental effect on aggregated test scores, and consequently result in unfair determinations of teacher quality. If the final result of a teacher accountability system is to implement pay systems for classroom teachers based on student scores, teachers may be less willing to support inclusive practices in the education of students with disabilities. We are concerned we will see increased resistance to include students

# WAPSD

Wyoming Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities

with disabilities, for fear that the performance scores they earn on standardized tests will compromise data used in performance evaluations and merit pay calculations.

A second issue addressed by stakeholders is the potential effect of implementing a merit system based on school scores. If building administrator and teacher effectiveness are measured by a school's student achievement, principals of magnet schools or schools that house high-needs programs are at a disadvantage. These same concerns were expressed by educators in the past regarding the reporting of PAWS scores by buildings. Collaboration and support among buildings within a district may be damaged as a result of who claims the scores of students with disabilities for rating purposes.

Teachers and school staff could be more likely to initiate referrals to school-based assistance teams at the first sign that students are performing more poorly than their peers. This practice discourages the use of general education interventions, and often results in unnecessary and costly referrals for multidisciplinary evaluations.

Some teachers have commented that the idea of assessing teachers in school that serve at-risk students is debilitating. Those who work in schools that have an overrepresentation of students with disabilities, will likely reconsider their assignments or their profession as a whole.

Many other states have enacted similar laws in recent years, and many of those states are now facing unintended consequences. We urge you to look at other states and cherry pick the best examples from their efforts, so that Wyoming stakeholders don't fall prey to these issues. One possible solution would be to consider evaluations based *in part* on test scores, and also include multiple indicators of teaching excellence.

Since the original passage of IDEA, there has been outstanding progress made towards reducing the separation between general and special education. Inclusive practices, response to intervention, co-teaching, and implementation of Universal Design have helped reduced barriers for students with disabilities. These collaborative efforts, beneficial for all students, have resulted in increased access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. Wyoming has witnessed an incredible increase in the graduation rates for students with disabilities in recent years. It is through this collaboration and shared responsibility between stakeholders that the walls between general and special education are beginning to come down.

The members of WAPSD want to bring these concerns to our attention in hopes of avoiding unintended consequences for Wyoming teachers and students. As this legislation progresses, please know that WAPSD members would be happy to provide input to your department, the

# WAPSD

*Wyoming Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities*

members of the accountability committee or any other legislative work group that you would deem appropriate.

Sincerely,



Carrie M. Brasher, Chairperson

CC: Cindy Hill  
Senate Education Committee  
Professional Standards Teaching Board