Schools currently depend heavily on special education instructors to manage students' individual transition plans and services, yet current requirements of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education inadequately address this area of need. As the bill has been voted upon favorably and is in the final stages of the legislative process, the most pressing concern for Bill H.3720, now Chapter 51 of the Acts of 2012, is its implementation. Through this process the new law may greatly meet the needs of students with disabilities by helping them meet their post-secondary goals.

The Bill

Bill H.3720: “An Act to promote the successful transition of students with disabilities to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living” (now Chapter 51 of the Acts of 2012)

Elevator Speech

Think back to your high school graduation. This may have been a very exciting and stressful time because while the possibilities seemed endless, there was great uncertainty in determining how to go about achieving goals. These same uncertainties are especially heightened for those with disabilities because they do not always receive the proper guidance and training to fulfill their post-secondary plans. As you may know, students with disabilities will have greater opportunity for success if their teachers are adequately trained in providing essential transition skills. Bill H.3720, An Act to Promote the Successful Transition of Students with Disabilities to Post-Secondary Education, Employment, and Independent Living will allow teachers greater avenues to teach transitional skills to students. We would like to ask for your support in the implementation of Bill H.3720 by petitioning teachers to utilize this opportunity to continue their professional education in transition services. By working together, we can instill a greater demand among teachers to obtain valuable skills in preparing students with disabilities for successful transition into adulthood.
Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Erin

Massachusetts Advocates for Children Meeting

In this meeting, we wanted to better understand what implementation would be like for Bill H.3720, and what role an advocacy group like MAC would play in making sure that schools and families are doing what they should. We wanted to connect with them and demonstrate that we supported their work as well. We intended to speak with Julia Landau, Senior Project Director of the Disability Education Justice Initiative, as we understood her to be very knowledgeable about what an implementation process may entail for advocates and parents. However, given that she was busy at the time of our visit, we had the opportunity to speak to Tom Mela, the MAC Children’s Law Support Project Director. Mr. Mela let us briefly know what the rest of the legislative process for the bill would encompass, and that regulations would be required (and would have to be set forth by the DESE). This gave me a clearer idea of the more nitty-gritty, behind the scenes components of an implementation process for any law, but particularly a law concerning public education. Mr. Mela also challenged us with crucial questions regarding implementation of the bill, and what direction our thinking should be in: Who does what? What does sound implementation look like? These questions helped guide us throughout the semester in learning more about the implementation process for this transition bill. Mr. Mela also suggested that we could get an idea of the concerns that arose within the bill by tracking its history from the past 2-3 years, which we hoped would provide insight into the problems that the bill originally attempted to address, and how that might affect the change that the bill could potentially bring in its final form.

Haley

Interview with Dr. Susan Parish

This was a very interesting interview as it brought in a completely different perspective on parent involvement in the special education system. Up until this point, we had received mainly positive or neutral responses to the idea of parent involvement in the implementation of this Transition Coordinator Law, now called Chapter 51 of the Acts of 2012. For instance, most of my conversations with Tina from MAC, or even Seth Goldberg and Scott Lieber [legislative staff for Rep. Tom Sannicandro] had encouraged us to promote parental involvement in implementation strategies. However, when speaking with Dr. Parish, she admittedly had a rather pessimistic perspective on how realistic it is to urge parents to make change in the system. She gave a precise description of special education structure in terms of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and how there are federal mandates for transition planning that often are not carried out, “it falls apart at implementation.” This is due to the fact that schools usually override what a family wants for their children, and the partnership between parents and teachers is not structured the way it should be. She explained how the difficulty that parents of non-disabled children face are often difficult to overcome, so imagine how much sophisticated advocacy work is needed for parents of children with special needs to challenge administrators and special education professionals.

I thought that it was very valuable to hear a different perspective on the structure of the special education system. It reminded me that there are many different opinions on these issues, and it is important to take what she had to say with a grain of salt. I was impressed by her honesty in stating that she did not know what types of regulations would be needed for implementation of the bill, and she did advise that I contact Elizabeth Bostic, a parent of children with disabilities who teaches parents to become advocates for their children.

Update

As of March 1, 2012 the bill has been signed by the Governor and is now effectively law.
Over 1.4 million Massachusetts workers have inadequate sick leave, which neither allows them to sufficiently take care of themselves, nor allows them to take care of their families. Half of these workers have no sick time at all. As a result, workers spend more time sick, businesses lose productivity, and the public health of Massachusetts suffers. An Act for Establishing Earned Paid Sick Time solves this issue by allowing workers to earn time off with which to recover from illness and by ensuring this time can also be used to care for family members in need.

The Bill


Excerpt from Storybook

Sara Ferreira is an immigrant from South Africa. She moved to the United States when she was young for the increased security it would provide. With her, she brought the conviction that you need to stand up for things that you need. Here in Massachusetts, she was shocked when she “couldn’t take a day off” without losing pay. And she says if she did, “I would worry about my boss” and how he would react the next day. She was afraid of being reprimanded or losing her job for taking care of her health.

Sara says she advocates for the Paid Sick Leave Bill because “I don’t want another family to feel the way I feel.” The issue is one of human needs: paid sick days are a basic thing the workers of Massachusetts need.

Elevator Speech

Job security is a value at the heart of our society, especially during these hard economic times. Everyone benefits from a healthy economy, but a healthy economy requires healthy workers. Unfortunately, 40% of Massachusetts private sector workers lack a single guaranteed sick day. Without sick days, employees cannot keep themselves healthy, and infect their coworkers, resulting in 33,000 unnecessary cases of flu costing workers and their families