

Legislation Text

File #: 200108, **Version:** 0

Authorizing the Committee on People with Disabilities and Special Needs to hold hearings to examine current and best practices on secondary transition services for Philadelphia public school students.

WHEREAS, With 19,487 students enrolled in special education, the School District of Philadelphia has almost five times more students ages 6-21 enrolled than the next largest school district in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, Students with disabilities are legally entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”); and the Individualized Education Program (“IEP”) is the main tool school districts use to comply with the Act; and

WHEREAS, A component of the IEP, required for students in Pennsylvania ages 14 and older, is transition services. Transition services are a coordinated set of activities designed to prepare students with disabilities to move from school to post-school life including further education and employment; and

WHEREAS, Transition services are critical because they prepare each student to work, live and participate in the community as adults; and

WHEREAS, There exists serious concern that neither the Commonwealth, nor the School District are meeting their legal obligation to provide transition services to students; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Department of Education reports, in the School District for the 2017-2018 school year, which is the most recent year the District was monitored for transition services, 62 percent of the IEPs reviewed were not in compliance with the federal requirements for transition services; and

WHEREAS, The document, entitled Local Education Agency Performance on State Performance Plan Targets, shows that for the 2017-2018 school year, only 29 percent of students in the School District who had IEPs when they left high school were enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school, only 59 percent were either enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, and only 76 percent of students were either enrolled in higher education, a training program, or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school; and

WHEREAS, One example of a transition service is work-based learning. The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, an initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, defines work-based learning as a “supervised program sponsored by an education or training organization that links knowledge gained at the work site with a planned program of study.” Work-based learning is one of the strongest predictors of adult employment success for students and youth with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Each state has a Vocational Rehabilitation (“VR”) agency, and Pennsylvania’s VR office is called the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (“OVR”) and is responsible for helping individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain and maintain employment by providing vocational rehabilitation, job training and placement services; and

WHEREAS, Since 2014, both the federal and Pennsylvania governments have passed laws and allocated millions of dollars to try to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Two of the most important laws in this area are the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (“WIOA”) and the Work Experience for High School Students with Disabilities Act, also known as Act 26. Both require school districts and OVR offices to collaborate to ensure that students are being prepared for life after high school; and

WHEREAS, Act 26 requires OVR to publish quarterly reports concerning the number of students with disabilities that each OVR district office is serving in categories such as, the number of IEP meetings attended by OVR counselors and the number of job referrals made on behalf of students with disabilities on a county by county basis; and

WHEREAS, Act 26 reports for 2017-2018 revealed that OVR counselors from the Philadelphia office attended only 43 IEP meetings, job referrals were made on behalf of only 215 students, and only 69 students were working in part time or summer jobs as a result of referrals made by the Philadelphia OVR office. Such numbers are sorely disproportionate to the total population that OVR is charged to service; and

WHEREAS, Act 26 reports for 2018-2019 revealed that OVR counselors from the Philadelphia office attended 190 IEP meetings, job referrals were made on behalf of 291 students, and 186 students are working in part time or summer jobs as a result of referrals made by the Philadelphia OVR office. Such numbers are sorely disproportionate to the total population that OVR is charged to service; and

WHEREAS, Hearings will deepen the public’s understanding of whether the School District is meeting its legal obligation to provide quality transition services to eligible students with disabilities that prepare students to work, live and participate in the community as adults, allow stakeholders to identify challenges/successes to collaboration between School Districts and OVR District Offices, and make recommendations to improve the provision of transition services under the IDEA and pre-employment transition services under WIOA to students; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Authorizes the Committee on People With Disabilities and Special Needs to hold hearings to examine current and best practices on secondary transition services for Philadelphia public school students.