

HB 2376 -- Autism Spectrum Disorder

Sponsor: Grisamore

This bill changes the laws regarding the identification, assessment, and education of children with autism spectrum disorder. In its main provisions, the bill:

- (1) Requires the state to provide early intervention services to children with autism under Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act, sometimes known as the First Steps Program;
- (2) Requires course work in teacher training programs to include recognition of the characteristics and special needs of students with disabilities or autism and students who are gifted;
- (3) Adds autism spectrum disorder to the definition of "children with disabilities";
- (4) Adds consideration of children with autism to the duties of state and area advisory commissions on special education;
- (5) Raises the ending age for early childhood special education from four to five years of age;
- (6) Allows schools to contract for services for children with autism;
- (7) Requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide a comprehensive, easy-to-understand guide to the individualized education plan process to help parents be effective in admission, review, and dismissal committee meetings. A notice about the availability of the guide must also be included in student handbooks and on school web sites;
- (8) Requires the Missouri Advisory Council of Certification for Educators to make recommendations on training and best practices for teachers of children with autism;
- (9) Requires the department to appoint an autism ombudsman and to develop best practice guidelines for the assessment and evaluation of handicapped children from three to five years of age. Regional professional development centers must have an autism specialist available. Early childhood centers will be created, upon appropriations, giving priority to regions where there is significant need and limited resources. Children who are receiving early childhood services on or after August 1, 2010, will be monitored for educational outcomes until they complete third grade;

(10) Adds standards for the identification, assessment, and interventions for children with autism to the Parents as Teachers Program;

(11) Creates categorical funding for special needs identification and education and authorizes a tax credit for unreimbursed training expenses that exceed the categorical funding. All instructional employees from kindergarten to second grade and parent educators for the Parents as Teachers Program must be trained in autism early detection by July 1, 2012. Instructional personnel for the remaining grades, nurses, and counselors must complete training by July 1, 2014; and

(12) Establishes the Autism Spectrum Disorder Commission in the Department of Mental Health which must prepare a 10-year plan by December 1, 2009.