



**Testimony
Special Education WACs
OSPI
September 3, 2009**

Good Afternoon. My name is Kay Purcell. I serve as the Assistant Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of Seattle. One of my areas of responsibility is supporting our schools to provide services to their students with special needs. I also work with them on school accreditation and securing federal programs and professional development. Previously I served for 11 years as principal of one of our Pre-K - 8 elementary schools.

I am here today on behalf of the Washington State Catholic Conference, which represents the Catholic Bishops of our state on issues of public policy, to support the proposed change to WAC 392-172A-04075. Catholic Schools comprise the largest private school system in Washington State, representing 94 schools and 28,034 students.

Currently, WAC 392-172A-04075 prohibits special education services from being provided in non-sectarian schools. The state has proposed an amendment allowing the provision of these services on the premises of religious elementary and secondary schools. We support this important change.

Students with special needs attend all types of schools, including private religious schools. Prohibiting special education services to students in religious schools seems an injustice to those families who value a faith based education for their children with special needs. In my years as principal, I witnessed numerous families struggling with the decision about whether to leave their child in the school community that supported their faith and values, or whether to withdraw their child from the school in order that their child receive needed services.

I also saw families who made the decision to keep their child in a religious school, but elected for the child to receive special education services in the public school. This entailed disruption to their child's school day in order to provide transportation to and from the public schools. I never saw a solution that was in the best interest of the student or the family. The proposal before us today would profoundly change the experience for those students and families.

There would be mutual benefit to both the state and the children if special education services are provided in religious schools. Families would be encouraged to seek identification of special needs students at an earlier age, thus services could be provided at an earlier stage of development. My experience indicates that parents delay having their child tested for fear that if the child is identified as eligible for special education, then they would have to make a difficult decision about accessing

services, changing schools, or providing transportation for their student. It is clear that early intervention and support can reduce the need for services at the secondary level. Also, in many areas of the state most of the students in our religious kindergarten through eighth grade schools matriculate into public high schools, which are strengthened by receiving well prepared students.

Since I stepped into my present position a year ago, it has come to my attention that there is a wide discrepancy in the level of communication and interaction between private schools and the school district in which they reside. I was fortunate to work with a school district that was cooperative, but still the level of services available to students and the ease in accessing those services varied at different public schools within the district. It often took months, if not years, to access needed services.

I also know that there are school districts that have not been cooperative in working with private schools in assisting with the provision of services provided by federal Title funds. My hope would be that when these rules are put in place, it will provide a positive opportunity for communication and collaboration between public schools/school districts, and private schools to further the academic progress of the special needs students. Leadership from OSPI, ESDs (Educational Service Districts) and school districts will make a substantial difference by ensuring implementation of the rule changes and effective facilitation of the services to be provided.

This rule change would provide an opportunity for all the students in Washington State to have equal access to educational services to meet their academic potential. The adoption of this WAC is in the best interest of our students and families, and will strengthen our education system and our state.

Thank you for your consideration.

When it is appropriate, I also have some questions:

1. What is the effective date of this rule change?
2. How will OSPI communicate with private schools about this rule change?
3. How will the rule change be communicated to public schools?
4. How can cooperation between public and private schools be fostered?
5. Who should we contact about who need assessments?
6. How will funding flow? Services purchased by school district? By the local school? If availability of services is not provided, how does the religious school contract and get reimbursed?
7. Where do we go if there is a lack of cooperation with the school district?