

January 23, 2013

SB 14 Provide Funding for 19 year old students

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Paris Gibson Education Center typically serves 10-16 students per year that are 19 years old or older. We also serve 20-25 students per year that are identified as special education students and have a current IEP. These special education students are 19-21 years old and are typically Cognitively Delayed Students.

C.M. Russell High School and Great Falls High School also serve 19 year old students that are general education students, typically 4-7 at CMR and 2-4 at GFHS. They will also serve special education students up the age of 21 that are on active IEP's.

Over the past four years I have lost approximately 20% of my staff at Paris due to budget cuts. I am currently budgeting for the loss of one or two more staff members due to more budget restraints. With the passage of this bill I could keep at least one if not both of these staff members and start to control the hemorrhaging of cuts. During these cuts our numbers of students that we serve has dropped by about 5% but we do have a waiting list for students to enter. Some of these are students that are overage.

Students that are overage that attend do it for a variety of reasons and we feel it is our ethical responsibility to educate them. The following is just an example of the twelve students we have at Paris this year that are enrolled and overage. Their reasons for attending are:

1. Alan, mentally ill brother that has caused family disruption and dysfunction. Alan stayed home for over a year to protect other family members from the brother.
2. Nate, made poor decisions early in his high school career. Was involved with drugs and alcohol, made the decision to get clean and did. By then graduation math took over, he realized that he would be too old to graduate. He asked to come and prove himself and did. Graduates this winter.
3. Bill, nice kid very social some personal issues but was the primary care giver to two younger, elementary aged siblings. Had to get them to school and also had to work as his dad had been laid off and had no income. Would travel to other states for short term work then was too far behind in school. He is on track to graduate this June.
4. Randy, again providing for his family, high poverty and embarrassed to ask for assistance. Some drug and alcohol issues but many issues outside his control.
5. Nick, was a good student and good kid that hated school. He figured it out at 18 and made a 180 degree turn and is on track to graduate this spring.
6. Phillip came to us from the Philippines needing to finish two classes to graduate, he is graduating this winter.

7. Sally was sexually assaulted, became pregnant, lost the baby, and had health issues. She comes from a very dysfunctional family. School is not easy for her but she is now on track to graduate at age 19 this spring.
8. John, was not in school for two plus years due to extreme mental illness. After receiving intense care, change in family situation, medication and continued support he is on track to graduate this spring. He was so motivated that for a year would be dropped off at school at 5:30am because that was the only ride he had.
9. Shelly, is a Native American young lady who moved multiple times to assist the family and tend to cultural issues. She still has multiple absences that are beyond her control but she will graduate this spring.
10. James, was square peg in a round hole and quit school at 15. He was intrigued with our school and saw an opportunity. He has been an incredible producer but has slipped again due to many factors, He may not graduate but he is 100% ready for a GED if he chooses that route, if not we will allow him one more year as a 20 year old.
11. Randi came to us this year overage due to some domestic violence because of a mutual altercation with a stepfather. She is homeless and only 1.5 credits from a diploma. She will graduate this spring if she maintains her current progress.
12. Conner was a gearhead that could not see the benefit of school other than shop class. He will testify and include the rest of his story today.

Students that are overage come for a variety of reasons; most importantly they have discovered that a diploma is their only way to a better life. Many of these students have had to overcome barriers that they did not cause. Many are struggling with health issues, both mental and physical. Some are homeless; some just screwed up and finally grew up. We love getting these students, they are motivated, intelligent and willing to work hard if they can only get in. I have no discipline issues, they are usually great examples to the other students and we get them done with a college, career and citizenship ready diploma in hand. Many go on to college or military, some go straight to the work force. With funding for the 19 year old student we can continue to provide a needed service for our community, one that pays off quickly.