

COLORADO STATE SENATE

MAJORITY OFFICE



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Bipartisan bill recognizes rural school partnerships



DENVER— The Colorado Senate passed a bill that will allow seven rural school districts to continue providing special education and related services without disruption or increased expense. House Bill 14-1208, sponsored by Sen. Rachel Zenzinger, D-Arvada, and Sen. Steve King, R-Grand Junction, authorizes and grandfathers three existing, multi-district partnerships: Mesa County, Gunnison, and Fort Lupton/Keenesburg Consortium.

Under the Exceptional Children's Educational Act, responsibility and funding for delivery and administration of special education and related services at the local level is assigned to an "administrative unit." For decades, three small groups of rural school districts had formed partnerships to share responsibilities. The partnerships benefitted the districts that lacked resources to meet administrative unit requirements on a standalone basis.

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) approved and recognized these multi-district arrangements; however, a CDE audit revealed this type of partnership is not allowed under statute.

"Years ago, seven school districts in Colorado found creative ways to form three separate partnerships, thus providing critical services to children who need them," said Sen. Zenzinger. "Those services include occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, psychology, early childhood special education and support for deaf students. This bill allows the continuation of this good work."

Sen. Zenzinger described the Hinsdale County School District as the perfect beneficiary of this bill. The school district consists of one preschool – 12th grade school, with a total enrollment of 80 students. The district does not have the financial or human resources to function independently as an administrative unit. Hinsdale's partnership with the Gunnison Watershed School District allows the hiring of shared service providers for special education. Without HB 14-1208, the Hinsdale County School District would have to enter into a partnership with the nearest Board of Cooperative Services (BOCES), which is more than 120 miles and two major mountain passes away.

HB 14-1208 will be sent to the Governor to sign into law.

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About Sen. Rachel Zenzinger: Sen. Rachel Zenzinger serves Colorado Senate District 19, which spans most of Arvada and the Jefferson County portion of Westminster. She was appointed to her seat and sworn into office on Dec. 13, 2013. She serves on the Senate Education Committee, Senate Local Government Committee and she is a Senate advisor to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. Her professional background is in education, and she was coordinator of the Regis University Master of Arts in Education program. For more information about Sen. Zenzinger, please go to www.RachelForColorado.com or call her at 303-866-4840.