



ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK



The Advocate

HELPING CHILDREN SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

SPRING 2009



WWW.ADVOCATESFORCHILDREN.ORG

MISSION STATEMENT

Advocates for Children promotes access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. We use uniquely integrated strategies to advance systemic reform, empower families and communities, and advocate for the education rights of individual students.

Join us for our summer benefit, June 17th at MARQUEE

Cocktails, Cupcakes and A Cause!

Tickets are available at www.advocatesforchildren.org



NEW REPORT SAYS NYC SCHOOL REFORMS LEFT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES BEHIND

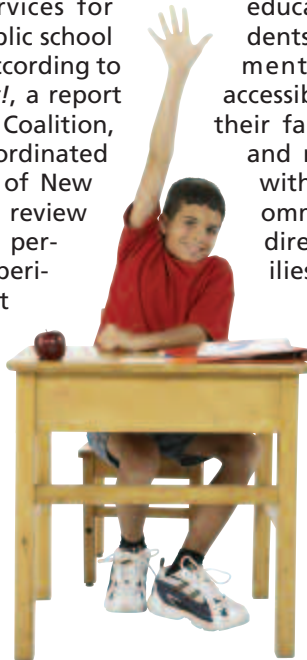
ARISE Coalition Report Identifies Priorities for Reform

The past seven years of education reform have not significantly improved outcomes, experiences or services for New York City's 160,000 public school students with disabilities, according to *Include! Educate! Respect!*, a report issued in April by the ARISE Coalition, an effort initiated and coordinated by Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). The report is a review of the changes made, the performance data, and the experiences of parents as a result of the Children First reforms to the New York City public schools.

The report makes concrete recommendations for reform including: a call for the DOE to study and invest in successful instructional practices for students with disabilities;

an appeal to the DOE to enforce existing law and policies ensuring that all educational plans for individual students with disabilities be fully implemented; and a demand for more accessible information for students and their families about programs, services and resources available for students with disabilities. Several of the recommendations of the report came directly from stories offered by families of students with disabilities in New York City, and these stories were used to punctuate the report's analysis.

For more information or a copy of the report, log onto the ARISE Coalition website at www.arisecoalition.org or contact the Coalition's coordinator, Maggie Moroff, at mmoroff@advocatesforchildren.org.



AFC PARTICIPATES IN STATE PANEL EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES TO THE IEP DIPLOMA

On April 29, the New York State Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities convened a Regional Meeting to discuss whether to develop an alternative diploma or credential to signify readiness to work. AFC attorney, Christie Hill, along with twelve other representatives, was invited to participate in the meeting as a panelist. New York Regents Roger Tilles and Harry Phillips were also present at the meeting.

Panelists discussed the need to ensure that any alternative credential would address the wide spectrum of needs of students with disabilities. In addition, students who are on track to receive an alternative diploma must also have access to a quality education that focuses on academics. The Regents determined to pick up this conversation in their May and November meetings.

For more information, contact Christie Hill, cnhill@advocatesforchildren.org.

The Advocate

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AFC ANNOUNCES NEW COLLABORATION TO SERVE PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

AFC is pleased to announce that it has partnered with Resources for Children with Special Needs and the Jewish Child Care Association to create Parent Centers Without Walls (PCWWs) in Manhattan and the Bronx. The PCWWs provide parents of children with disabilities in these two boroughs with free information, training

and direct assistance. They seek to build the capacity of parents to meet the educational and related needs of children with disabilities. Through training and support, the PCWWs ensure access to programs, community resources and assistance to enable parents to obtain appropriate educational services for their children.

For more information or to request a workshop, contact
Lilliana Diaz-Pedrosa, ldp@advocatesforchildren.org.

OUR CHILDREN OUR SCHOOLS: A BLUEPRINT FOR CREATING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS - MARCH 2009

Over 60% of children in New York City public schools are immigrants or the children of immigrants, but a report by Advocates for Children shows that immigrant families face significant obstacles to participating in their children's education. The report, written in collaboration with immigrant advocates and community groups throughout the city, shows that many immigrant parents remain shut out of school activities and leadership opportunities despite the Department of Education's (DOE's) recent efforts to increase parent involvement in schools. The report offers a number of concrete solutions for building stronger and more meaningful partnerships between schools, immigrant parents and community leaders.

Immigrant parents interviewed for the report described being blocked at the door by school security because they do not have official identification, intimidated by school staff who are insensitive or unresponsive to their needs and discriminated against because of their background or limited English abilities. Research shows that family involvement is directly correlated with student success, and immigrant parent involvement can play a critical role in reversing a disturbing decline in New York City's English Language Learner graduation rates.

The report highlights successful strategies being used in schools in the City and in other states and offers 48 recommendations on how the DOE and schools can strengthen partnerships with immigrant families, including: creating a standing citywide advisory committee on family-school-community partnerships; holding an annual immigrant planning summit with community-based organizations; and issuing a statement that the New York City school system is a safe zone for immigrant parents. At the school level, the report recommends creating a parent welcoming committee/multi-cultural advisory committee, issuing identification cards to parents, using non-written means of communication and collaborating with CBOs to reach immigrant parents. Finally, the report recommends strengthening parent leadership and decision-making opportunities in the schools.

The report was issued by Advocates for Children in collaboration with the Chinese Progressive Association, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, Filipino American Human Services, Inc., Haitian Americans United for Progress, La Union (Fifth Avenue Committee), Lutheran Family Health Centers, and the Metropolitan Russian American Parents Association.

For more information, contact Arlen Benjamin-Gomez,
abg@advocatesforchildren.org

AFC CO-SPONSORS FORUM ON OVERAGE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

On April 27, Advocates for Children and the Academy for Educational Development (AED) co-sponsored a forum for educators that discussed developing opportunities, programs and services for overage middle school students in New York City. The forum offered participants the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the issues affecting these students, make connections and partnerships with colleagues, and leave with information on programs that can be implemented in their own schools. Panelists included educators from two New York City middle schools that were piloting promising programs for overage students as well as a model program from the Boston Urban Youth Foundation. Participants were encouraged to continue the conversation on line at: <http://middlestart.org/forums/viewforum/6/> where

stakeholders from across the city can gather to identify common challenges and share information on promising practices to address the needs of the growing overage middle school student population. The website is supported by AED and AFC.



For more information on AFC's work with respect to overage middle school students, contact Christie Hill at cnhill@advocatesforchildren.org, or download a copy of AFC's policy report, *Stuck in the Middle*, at www.advocatesforchildren.org.

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FOURTH ANNUAL HOMELESS EDUCATION WORKSHOP SERIES

This spring, the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students at Advocates for Children (NYS-TEACHS) proudly hosted our fourth annual Homeless Education Workshop series, in partnership with the New York State Education Department. Drawing on experts from national organizations as well as state and local agencies, the Workshop sessions offered an in-depth look at the policies that guarantee access to school for students living in temporary housing. Participants shared strategies and best practices to ensure the state's most vulnerable students stay connected with school.

The *2009 McKinney-Vento Workshops* brought nearly 1,000 social service providers and school district staff from all parts of the state together in 4 events with trainings, discussion groups and networking opportunities. Participants described the workshops as, "Very helpful and resourceful," and "Very welcoming." One participant noted, "Everything was applicable to my job... Thank you!"

Joining us this year were school personnel, staff from Local Departments of Social Services, family shelters, domestic violence shelters, runaway and homeless youth programs, pre-school programs, Head Start programs, and other social service organizations serving the State's homeless population.

A staggering number of families across New York State reside in temporary housing situations. In New York

City, alone, there were 51,316 students in temporary housing identified last year. Most of these students were living in shelters, but families in shelters represent only a fraction of those eligible for services under the law. Countless New Yorkers live "doubled-up" with friends or relatives due to a lack of alternate housing, and children in these types of temporary housing arrangements are at significant risk of educational instability and academic failure.

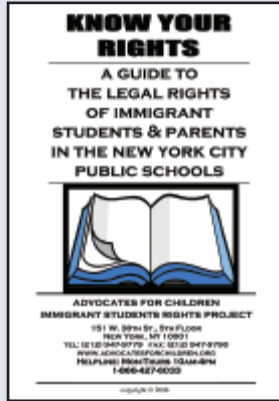
The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance, and success in school for students experiencing homelessness and to promote educational continuity for those whose housing is unstable. NYS-TEACHS provides trainings for school personnel, social service providers, and other professionals across the state about the law; we also operate a toll-free hotline to field questions and offer assistance to schools, families and service providers, and we distribute materials on the educational rights of students who are homeless.

NYS-TEACHS is housed at Advocates for Children of New York and is funded by the New York State Education Department to provide technical assistance to school districts, social service providers, shelters, families, youth and others about the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. For more information about NYS-TEACHS, please visit: www.nysteachs.org or call 1-800-388-2014.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

A GUIDE TO THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS & PARENTS IN THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Now available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Urdu!



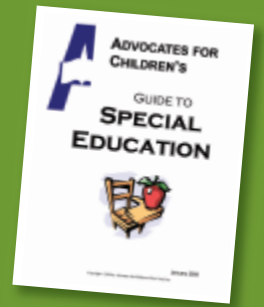
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TRANSLATION MADE POSSIBLE BY THE DURST FAMILY FOUNDATION

AFC'S UPDATED GUIDE TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

Our revised Special Education Guide is now available.

Visit our web site at www.advocatesforchildren.org and go to "Resources for Parents > Parent Guides" or call 212 947-9779, ext. 505 or email jbuccellato@advocatesforchildren.org for a copy



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KENDRA was a five-year-old kindergartner with special needs who was living in a foster home. She came to AFC's attention through its highly regarded Project Achieve, which works closely with foster care agencies to identify and address educational issues with the children they serve. Kendra's case planner asked for Project Achieve's help to obtain bus service to take Kendra to school. Because she did not have transportation, Kendra was often late to school while her foster parent tried to get several foster children with special needs to different schools on time.

Project Achieve helped Kendra's case planner request and obtain transportation for Kendra, but it quickly became apparent that her problems at school went beyond the school bus. Rather than working to ad-

dress Kendra's hyperactivity and often impulsive, but never aggressive, behavior, Kendra's school would call

her case planner or foster parent to take her home. The school eventually suspended Kendra, in violation of federal laws that protect students from disciplinary actions that are the result of their disability. Project Achieve staff armed Kendra's case planner with information about her legal rights, and with AFC's support, the case planner was able to get Kendra's suspension overturned. AFC then worked with the foster care agency to brainstorm additional services that would address Kendra's behavior and enable her to stay in the same school, rather than moving her to a school for only special education students. The case planner requested that the school provide Kendra with a paraprofessional and more sessions of sensory-based occupational therapy. Kendra's behavior has improved immensely with the new services.

For more information about AFC's **Project Achieve**, contact Erika Palmer, Epalmer@advocatesforchildren.org.

AN AFC Success Story



To learn more about how AFC **helps thousands of families** each year, or to make a tax-deductible donation, please visit our website www.advocatesforchildren.org.