



The Advocate

Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn

Spring/
Summer
2016

www.advocatesforchildren.org

Mission Statement

Advocates for Children of New York's mission is to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. AFC achieves this through four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals, to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and to compel needed education reform.



Success Story: Yshamar

Yshamar Gestine, a junior at New Visions Charter High School for Advanced Math and Science III, received AFC's Education Champion Award at our 2016 Spring Benefit in recognition of his hard work and perseverance to receive an appropriate education.

Yshamar came to New York City from Haiti during 4th grade, unable to identify letters or read words in any language. His mother asked his school repeatedly for help. Eventually, Yshamar was placed in a special education class, where he made little progress but was promoted each year because he worked hard and behaved well.

For 9th grade, Yshamar landed at New Visions knowing only a handful of letters. Yshamar's special education teacher saw his potential and included him in her remedial reading class three days a week. Using the Wilson Reading System, Yshamar started making progress, but his teachers recognized that he would need a lot more Wilson to make up for lost time and earn a diploma. Because he was so far behind his peers, the Department of Education (DOE) decided instead that Yshamar should be moved to a less challenging school that was not appropriate for his needs and goals.

Luckily, Yshamar and his mom were referred to AFC, where their lawyer built a strong case that he should remain at his school and receive the additional support his teachers had recommended. As the result of AFC's intervention, Yshamar was allowed to remain at his school, double his Wilson instruction, and receive an iPad to facilitate independent reading and writing. AFC also won Yshamar one-on-one tutoring during the summer.

Yshamar has never given up, and the results of his efforts have been amazing. He has passed four Regents exams—most recently, scoring a 70 on the English Language Arts exam—and is on track to earn a diploma in 2017! Yshamar hopes to attend college and become an accountant.



Yshamar with his teacher, Anna Spoden, at AFC's Spring Benefit.



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**AFC's Jill Chaifetz
Education Helpline**

866-427-6033

Mon. – Thurs. 10 AM – 4 PM

**To Schedule a Workshop or
Obtain a Publication:**

212-947-9779, Ext. 505

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Parents and Professionals from China Visit AFC



On June 22, 2016, AFC hosted a delegation of parents and professionals working with children with disabilities in China! The delegation was on a study tour, coordinated by the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) of New Jersey, to learn about inclusive education in the United States. While at our offices, they met with AFC staff and other members of the New York State Region I Parent Training and Information Center Collaborative, along with members of Parents for Inclusive Education, to discuss our work supporting families of students with disabilities. AFC also joined the group for a visit to P.S. 333 Manhattan School for Children.

Important Changes to Graduation Requirements

The New York State Board of Regents recently approved several changes to high school graduation requirements, which apply to students eligible to graduate in June 2016 or later.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REVIEW FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who have earned the required course credits and passed the math and English Language Arts (ELA) Regents exams can graduate with a local diploma, even if they are unable to pass the other required exit exams. To graduate under this new option, a student with an IEP must:

1. Score a minimum of 55 on the math and ELA exams (or successfully appeal a score of 52-54).
2. Pass Regents-level social studies and science courses and sit for the corresponding Regents exams. For any subject(s) in which the student is unable to pass the Regents exam, the superintendent will review the student's record to determine if he/she has otherwise met standards.

The superintendent's review will happen automatically and does not have to be requested by the student or parent. Note that this option does NOT apply to students with Section 504 plans or students who have been declassified from special education. For more information, see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/superintendent-determination-of-graduation-with-a-local-diploma.htm>.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT & OCCUPATIONAL STUDIES GRADUATION PATHWAY

The Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Commencement Credential is now available as an option for ALL students, not just students with disabilities, and can be substituted for a fifth exit exam. To graduate via this pathway, a student must earn the required course credits, pass four Regents exams (ELA, one Math, one History, and one Science), and complete all the requirements for the CDOS Commencement Credential. For more information, see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2016-memos/cdos-graduation-pathway-option.html>.

To learn more about graduation requirements and diploma options, check out the resources listed under "older students, graduation requirements, and transition" on AFC's website: http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/get_help/guides_and_resources.

AFC CELEBRATES ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR PROTECTING EVERY CHILD'S RIGHT TO LEARN!



Left: AFC Executive Director Kim Sweet, Board President Eric Grossman, and presenter Hoda Kotb.



Right: Marc and Cathy Lasry, 2016 recipients of the Jill Chaifetz Award, and Yshamar Gestine, AFC client and 2016 recipient of the Education Champion Award.

Thank you to everyone who supported AFC's 2016 Spring Benefit! On June 8, more than 600 guests joined us at Three Sixty° in downtown Manhattan to honor our award recipients, Marc and Cathy Lasry and Yshamar Gestine. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our 75 sponsors and our many individual supporters, we raised a record amount to help New York City students in the coming year!

If you weren't able to make it, visit <http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/node/1006> to listen to presenter Hoda Kotb's interview with Yshamar, his AFC attorney, and his teacher for SiriusXM radio. You can also view many more event photos on our Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/advocatesforchildren>.

AFC Welcomes Laur-Edine Pierre as our new Case Manager

AFC welcomes social worker Laur-Edine Pierre as our new case manager! In this newly created role at AFC, Laur-Edine will be working to deepen the impact of our work with students and families, beginning with a specific population of current clients who are transitioning out of high school. She will be linking families to outside social services and community resources, helping address obstacles that can prevent students from sustaining the educational gains we have helped them achieve, and coaching parents and youth so that they will be able to advocate for themselves in the future.



Laur-Edine Pierre

Laur-Edine, who has a B.S. in Psychology from Pacific Union College and a Masters in Social Work from Fordham University, interned with AFC's Robin Hood Project during her final year of graduate school and is thus well-poised to launch this new position. As an intern, Laur-Edine partnered with an AFC attorney to secure the supports necessary for a student with a disability to successfully transition into the workforce. She notes, "Linking this student with the effective social services was as important to achieving his future goals as finding an appropriate school had been to ensuring his past academic success." Laur-Edine also brings language skills that will strengthen AFC's capacity to serve immigrant families; she is a native speaker of Haitian Creole and is proficient in both French and Spanish.

THANK YOU to the New York City Council for renewing funding for the Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline!

With funding from the City Council over the past ten years, AFC has been able to provide more than 2,500 callers every year with free, one-on-one assistance on issues ranging from special education to suspensions. If your child is struggling in school or experiencing school discrimination of any kind, call the Helpline at **866-427-6033** between the hours of 10am and 4pm, Monday through Thursday.

PARENTS SAY...

"I cannot thank you enough for the plethora of information and the knowledge you have enlightened me with... Your time spent on the phone with me was invaluable."

"Thanks so much for your help... New York is lucky to have you and Helpline!"

Check Out New & Updated Resources from Advocates for Children!

- Our popular *Guide to Special Education* was recently revised to include the latest information, so make sure you are reading the June 2016 version! The updated guide will soon be available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, and Spanish.
- AFC's new publication *Early Childhood Education Programs: A Guide to Public Education Programs for 3 and 4 Year Olds*, available in both English and Spanish, provides helpful information on Pre-K for All, EarlyLearn NYC, and Head Start programs.
- Several of our publications on the rights of immigrant families and English Language Learners (ELLs) are newly available in Bengali, Chinese, and Haitian Creole, including our brochure *Program Options for English Language Learners: A Guide for New York City Parents* and our fact sheets on enrollment, promotion policy, and state testing and accommodations for ELLs.
- AFC has a new 5-minute *podcast on promotion policy* in New York City public schools. Both English and Spanish versions of the podcast are available.

All of these resources, along with many others on a variety of education topics, are available at http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/get_help/guides_and_resources.

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To Get Help

You can call our Helpline and speak to our education experts who will assess your problem and provide you with the appropriate help.

Call (866) 427-6033

Monday – Thursday, from 10 AM – 4 PM

Or email us at info@advocatesforchildren.org

*We Can
Speak to
You in YOUR
Language*

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To Make a Donation

If you would like to make a donation to support our critical services that help to improve education outcomes for thousands of NYC kids each year, please send your gift to:

Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.
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