

Citywide Council on Special Education

Testimony of the Citywide Council on Special Education (CCSE)

City Council's Education Committee

October 25th, 2013

We would like to thank the Chairperson of the City Council's Education Committee, Council Member Robert Jackson, and the rest of the members of this committee for holding this important hearing on the oversight of Special Education Reform.

The role of the CCSE is to advise and comment on educational and instructional policies for all NYC students who receive special education services. We hold monthly public meetings throughout the city to discuss issues affecting students with disabilities. Our council consists of twelve members-- nine voting members who are all parents of students currently receiving special education services, two members appointed by the Public Advocate of the City of New York, who have expertise and knowledge about educating, training, or employing people with disabilities, and one non-voting high school senior who receives special education services.

Since the Department of Education (DOE) began rolling out the reform with Phase 1 and implementing citywide in September of last year (2012), the CCSE has heard from hundreds of parents from all five boroughs. We far too often have listened to parents speak about their personal struggles and experiences navigating the special education process in relation to the reform initiative, and the emotional and educational tolls both their children and families have endured as the result of the DOE's policies and procedures.

While we fully support the goal of providing students with disabilities access to the full range of special education supports and services in the most inclusive setting appropriate for each student, we are concerned about the following troubling patterns we have seen thus far:

- Inability to resolve problems at their local school, as an example, within their IEP team, or with the network who supports their child's school

Failure to provide academic and behavioral supports and services, and accessible instructional curriculum for students based upon individual instructional needs

IEP teams not authorizing intensive or specialized support or settings because school based IEP teams no longer have the authority to make like decisions anymore, or because the school cannot provide such services or placement

- Students with IEP's in grades K, 1st, 6th, 7th, 9th, and 10th grades not having full access to all schools despite reform initiative

Students not receiving all related services that are mandated on their IEP's on time, or if at all because schools saying they do not resources to provide the services, or that the DOE does not have an approved provider

Failure to issue paperwork in a timely manner to restore delayed services to the students, such as Related Service Authorizations (RSAs) to provide Occupational Therapy Services

As the result of these concerns, we are asking the Department of Education be held accountable to the children and parents of New York City, by ensuring that the DOE:

- Identifying current or additional monies to develop and implement academic and behavioral supports and services in all schools
- Provide more professional development on access and inclusion for all school administrators
- Develop and implement additional accountability metrics and tools to better monitor the extent in which individual schools are programmatically, instructionally, and physically accessible to all students
- Issue remedy based paperwork faster so the city no longer violates individual student rights under the federal law that governs special education services, the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004)

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. Please, do not hesitate to contact us to further discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

The members of the Citywide Council on Special Education

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