



AJE UPDATE

Volume 13, Issue 2 • Know Your Rights • Fall 2014

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Mission

The mission of AJE is to educate parents, youth, and the community about the laws governing public education, specifically for children with special needs. We seek to empower youth and parents to be effective advocates and youth to self advocate to ensure that children receive an appropriate education. It is also our mission to make the public aware of the consequences of institutional negligence of children with or without disabilities to promote school accountability.

About AJE

AJE is home to the Parent Training and Information Center, DC Parent Information Network, DC Health Information Center, and the DC Parent Center.

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Procedural Safeguards: Parental Rights and Responsibilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, is a federal law that ensures early intervention, special education and related services for children and youth with disabilities (ages 0 – 21). IDEA requires **procedural safeguards** designed to protect the rights of children and youth with disabilities and their parents.

Below are some of the parental rights outlined in the Procedural Safeguards:

- Right to participate in all meetings
- Right to examine all educational records
- Right to obtain an independent educational evaluation (IEE) of their child
- Right to written notice when the school proposes to change or refuses to change the identification, evaluation or placement of a child
- Right to receive information in a way that you can understand (e.g., native language or other mode of communication that you use)
- Right to informed parental consent. Permission or consent must be obtained before evaluations or assessments, and reevaluations are conducted on your child. Consent must also be obtained before special education and related services are provided.
- Right to decline services
- Right to disagree without feeling guilty and resolve any disagreements through timely methods regarding any actions taken, proposed or refused by the Early Intervention Program or local education agency.

To learn more about your parental rights and responsibilities, parents in the District of Columbia are encouraged to contact their local Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center at Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc. We can be reached at (202) 678-8060.

5th Annual Week of Action Against School Pushout

This October 4th-11th marked the Fifth Annual National Week of Action on School Pushout, which is coordinated by the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC), a national coalition of more than 80 organizations led by youth, parents, educators, civil rights leaders and social justice advocates that promote alternatives to suspensions and zero-tolerance discipline policies. The Week of Action exists to raise awareness about the school pushout crisis in our nation's schools and to help launch and support local campaigns of students, parents, teachers and advocates across the country working to transform school discipline policies and practices.

What is School Pushout?

School pushout refers to school policies and practices that increase the likelihood a student will leave school instead of finishing school.

What is the link to Student Discipline?

Research shows that students suspended, expelled or arrested in school are more likely to drop out and fail to graduate on time. When students are suspended they

miss class time and are more likely to fall behind.

What's the problem with Pushout?

Pushout denies young people their right to education and makes it more likely that a young person will end up in the prison system. Research shows suspensions are ineffective at addressing misbehavior and that harsh discipline policies do not make safer schools. Also, school pushout is a civil rights issue because in DC and across the nation students of color, students with disabilities and students from low-income households are disproportionately suspended and expelled.

Facts about School Pushout in DC:

- Each year, thousands of students are suspended from school.
- In both DCPS and DC's public charter schools, students in grades 6-9 had the highest number of discipline events (suspensions and expulsions).
- African-American students were almost six times more likely to be disciplined as compared to white students and Latino students were more than two times more

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likely to be disciplined than white students.

- Students under the care of DC's child welfare system were more than two times more likely to be disciplined as non-CFSA students.
- Students from low-income families were 1.3 times more likely to be disciplined than students whose families were not low income.
- Most students who received special education services experienced higher rates of discipline than students who did not, although it depended on their disability classification and level.
- Students with a primary disability classification of Emotional Disturbance were 2.67 times more likely to be suspended or expelled whereas students with Autism were actually less likely to be suspended than their non-disabled peers.

October is also Youth Justice Awareness Month, and in honor of both campaigns AJE hosted a community event "A Call to Action: Solutions Not Suspensions" on Thursday, October 9th, 2014 at The Next Step

Public Charter School. The event included a documentary film screening, presentation about school pushout in DC, and the opportunity to take action. More than sixty parents, youth, and community advocates attended to show their support to push back against school pushout!

Ways to push back against school pushout:

Review and sign AJE's petition to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to commit to finalizing district-wide school discipline regulations that cover both DC's traditional public and public charter schools, in accordance with the recommendation in its recently released discipline report.

Contact your local representative and/or your child's school principal to tell them you support solutions not suspensions and that you want to see them take action to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions as well as the disparities in discipline.

FAQs on the Common Core State Standards

What are Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), are a set of college and career-ready educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. Forty-three (43) states and the District of Columbia have voluntarily adopted and are working to implement the standards.

What is the purpose of the CCSS?

The purpose of common core standards is to ensure that students who graduate from high school are prepared academically to enter two or four year colleges or to enter the workforce. Common core standards also were created to ensure that parents, students, and teachers have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, math, and writing.

Are the CCSS a curriculum?

Common core standards are not a curriculum. They don't tell teachers how to teach, they simply provide the standards in which they expect a student to reach by the end of the school year. Common core standards also do not dictate which materials or books teachers have to use in order to reach those standards.

What does state adoption for the CCSS mean?

State adoption means that the state has agreed to align their state standards with the common core standards. The common core standards will focus both on building content and skills for each grade level. The curriculum and instruction will still be left up to the state or District to decide what that should look like.

What value does the CCSS provide for parents?

Through the CCSS, parents will know what their children should have learned by the end of each grade level. The CCSS focuses on quality, specifically making sure that students are not just graduating but that they're prepared for post-secondary opportunities. Each grade level will cover fewer topics, but the content that the students learn will go much further in-depth. The CCSS sets high expectations for all students.

How will student success on the CCSS be measured?

In the District of Columbia, students will be assessed using the Partnership

for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) instead of the DC-CAS starting in the 2014-2015 school year. It will be an interactive, computer-based test that will measure student's success on the common core standards. The test will measure a student's progress in reading, writing, and math for grades 3-11.

Are there alternate assessments for eligible students who have special needs?

Similar to the DC-CAS Alternate Assessment, there will be an alternate assessment for the PARCC exam. The District of Columbia will be using an alternate assessment, the National Center and State Collaborative Partnership, starting in the 2014-2015 school year. This exam will be provided to students with severe cognitive disabilities who are found eligible to take an alternate assessment. The NCSC will address curriculum, instruction, and assessment needs for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Do eligible special needs students still receive their accommodations on the PARCC or alternative assessment?

Yes. The accommodations written in the IEP 504 Plan for standardized assessments will be given for the PARCC and the alternate assessment.

How do the common core standards affect children with Individualized Education Programs (IEP)?

Common core standards are now being written into IEPs. Students with disabilities will still be required to work toward reaching their grade level standard. The IEP will blend common core standards with specialized instruction to assist the student in mastering their grade level standard.

This information is adapted from The Common Core State Standards Initiative, www.corestandards.org.

Parent's Corner: Back-to-School IEP Checklist for Parents

The start of a new school year requires planning for all parents. A new academic year for parents of children with special needs, means additional preparation to ensure that their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) is serving its purpose. To assist parents with a new year of IEP advocacy, below is a Back-to-School IEP Checklist for Parents.

Introduce.

Introduce yourself to your child's new teachers and service providers. Use this time to initiate friendly contact; and as an opportunity to share general important information about your child. This can be done in person or via telephone or email. Below are examples of who you should introduce yourself to.

- General Education Teachers
- Special Education Teacher/ Case Manager
- Special Education Coordinator
- Related Service Providers (Speech Pathologist, Social Worker, etc.)

Monitor.

Monitor and observe your child's progress on a consistent and regular basis. You should express

your concerns as soon as they arise to your child's teachers and service providers. To assist with monitoring your child's progress, we suggest that you review your child's quarterly IEP progress report and IEP Service Tracker logs. The IEP progress report summarizes the progress that your child has made on their specialized instruction and related services IEP goals. The IEP Service Tracker logs indicate when your child received their related services. The IEP Service Tracker also informs you of what goals were worked on during each related service session.

Notify.

Notify the IEP team of your desire to have a meeting. You do not have to wait until the annual IEP meeting if you have concerns about your child's academic progress. Formally write your request for an IEP meeting and submit it to the Special Education Coordinator or the designated local education agency (LEA) representative at your child's school.

Organize.

Organization is critical to achieving a successful school year for your child. We suggest that you

utilize a calendar or daily planner to keep track of important dates pertaining to your child (e.g., parent teacher conferences, back to school nights, etc.) and meetings (e.g., PTA meetings, IEP and MDT meetings, etc.). Also, make a home file to organize your child's IEP and other useful school records. This will ensure that you're able to store important documents and retrieve them easily when needed. Organize and store important records including, but not limited to:

- Health forms and medical records
- Present and past IEPs
- Current and former evaluations and assessment reports
- IEP meeting notes/ notes from teachers & service providers
- Report cards/ progress reports, etc.
- Behavior and disciplinary notices

Being an involved and prepared parent is a great advocacy skill great advocacy skill for a parent to have. Apply these useful tips to create a successful school year for you and your child.

Accommodations for Children and Adolescents with Sickle Cell



Similar to all children who have a chronic health condition children diagnosed with Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) are at increased risk for school absenteeism related to their illness. Unexpected episodes of pain, increased risk for stroke and chronic anemia are just a few examples of the symptoms that may interfere with school

attendance and performance. Often times due to the challenges associated with SCD, a student with sickle cell disease may qualify for special education and related services as a child with Other Health Impairment (OHI) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA); if their condition interferes with their ability to learn and make progress in school. Special education and related services are provided to eligible students through an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Students with SCD may also qualify for accommodations and modifications under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, if found eligible for IEP services. The 504 Plan ensures students with qualifying disabilities

receive equal access to the general education curriculum and are able to participate fully in daily school activities through the implementation of accommodations, modifications and related services.

Below are some examples of accommodations, modifications and support services for students with Sickle Cell Disease:

- Two sets of textbooks, one for home and one for school;
- Permission to carry a bottle of water to drink throughout the school day;
- Bathroom and clinic passes when needed;
- Excusal from participating in physical education activities that involve strenuous exercises and long-distance running;
- Exemption from outdoor activities when temperature is too cold or too hot (less than 40 degrees or greater than 90 degrees);
- Moderate workload with fewer assignments when absent from school for clinic visits, hospitalizations or complications resulting from their diagnosis;
- An intermittent homebound teacher to help with assignments when student is out of school due to issues associated with their illness;
- Medication administered by a school nurse during the school day.

School personnel and caregivers play a major role in a child's health and academic success. For children living with SCD, it is important that appropriate support plans be developed to ensure academic success. For assistance with obtaining the necessary school accommodations and support for your child with SCD, please contact our office at (202) 678-8060.



How to Protect Your Child from Bullying

Parents can play an important role in educating their children about bullying, promoting positive and safe behaviors in their children and protecting their children from bullying incidents. The most important foundation is his or her sense of safety and security. Here are some practical tips for parents on how to protect your child from bullying:

- 1. Listen.** The first thing your child needs to know is that you understand how he or she feels. Two natural feelings in response to being bullied are shame and anger. It may be difficult to listen to your child talk about shame or anger, but it is very important to do so in order to let them know that their feelings are okay. If your child doesn't think you understand their feelings, it will be exceedingly difficult for him or her to seek support from you. After all, shame motivates us to hide, to keep a low profile and not to raise painful topics with anyone — even our parents.
- 2. Share.** If you can talk about memories of your own experiences of being bullied, teased, dissed or rejected as a child, and you can talk about how you felt at the time, you will send your child the message that this experience is normal and survivable. Your child will not only learn how to handle bullying incidents, but also how to manage their emotions and reactions difficult situations. This is a great opportunity to develop emotional intelligence with your child by talking about difficult feelings.
- 3. Brainstorm.** It is more important for your child to learn to solve problems than to have them solved for him or her. After listening to their feelings, invite your son or daughter to think about what can be done to address the issue(s). Allow them to come up with suggestions and accept their suggestions in the spirit of brainstorming with the plan of later choosing the best idea(s) to act on. While brainstorming with your child, identify adults at school or in the program (director, principal, social worker, etc) where the bullying incident occurred that your child should notify these specific individuals when they feel unsafe or have been bullied.
- 4. Follow Up.** Encourage your child to put the plan into action. Participate in role playing on how to address bullying situations. Discuss after each role play. Create a list of key players that your child should notify when they've been bullied or if they see a peer being bullied. Obtain and review the Bullying Prevention Policy at your child's school to know how to formally report bullying incidents to be investigated appropriately. The Mayor's Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012 required all schools to have a bullying prevention policy in place by September 14, 2013.