



AJE UPDATE

Volume 11, Issue 4 • Promoting Positive Behaviors • January 2013

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Our 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 Health Information Center, and the DC Parent Center.

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Policy Corner at AJE

School Closings

What does the proposed list of school closings mean to students with disabilities? Changes will be made, and we need to make sure that students with special needs are treated fairly. District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has proposed closing Prospect Learning Center (a campus that serves elementary students with learning disabilities) and returning students to their neighborhood schools. They have also decided to merge Sharpe Health and Mamie D Lee and move them to a newly renovated River Terrace in 2014. Many of the schools that will be closed house specific programs for students with disabilities, and no programs have been announced for the new locations. We raised all of these issues when we testified at city council and we plan to stay engaged as this process continues,

asking the right questions and sharing our expertise. AJE is working with the DCPS Office of Special Education to ensure that all families are given the right information so that they can make choices that are in the best interest of their students and for their families.

Bullying Prevention

On November 28, AJE Executive Director Kim Jones was sworn in as an official member of the Mayor's Task Force on Bullying. The Task Force is a product of the Youth Bullying Prevention Act signed by Mayor Gray last June. The act provides a model policy and guidance for all schools, including public charter and traditional schools and the University of the District of Columbia, as well as libraries and recreational centers, helping them combat bullying in the city. AJE

has actively participated in the meetings and is also part of the youth engagement subcommittee, ensuring that the voices of youth are heard in this process.

At AJE, we aim to make sure that families are represented in the larger conversations in the city around education. With your story we can make sure your voices are heard. You too can speak up when you attend a meeting, testify at a hearing or participate in a workshop. Please feel free to reach out to AJE's Policy Director, at Suzanne.greenfield@aje-dc.org (or call 202-678-8060) and tell us what concerns you have and let's see if we can find an opportunity to share your story and make sure all students in this city receive the education they deserve.

Parent Corner: Strategies for Addressing Challenging Behaviors at Home

As a parent of a child with special needs, I sympathize with other parents who are struggling with maladaptive behaviors at home. My son has his share of behavior challenges and I have spent many nights trying to find a way to achieve some harmony in our home. I don't have any more answers than your average parent of a child with special needs, but I have learned some lessons and achieved some successes over the last few years. Some behaviors my son exhibited were physically aggressive towards others. His teachers also observed behavioral challenges at school. Due to the behavior challenges my son faced at home and at school, his teacher informed me of the Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA), an assessment used to help determine the function(s)

of behaviors. Through the FBA, the school was able to track my son's behavior over a period of time to determine the types of behaviors, frequency and why the behavior was occurring. At the completion of the FBA, the findings revealed that the primary function of my son's behavior was to seek attention. Without the observations and insights from the right professionals, I would've been unable to see that my son was having behavior challenges because he needed attention. At the end of a long day, with meals to make and kids to take care of, I was too busy to see the need behind the problem. It was even more challenging to understand his needs because my son is non-verbal. Based on the FBA, the Individualized Education Program team created a Behavior Intervention Plan to support my son.

Resources for Addressing Behavior Challenges

Parents often worry about the social-emotional state or behavior of their child, but knowing where to get help can be challenging. Parents are often faced with the difficulty of identifying appropriate providers and navigating a system that can be complicating. If your child exhibits behaviors that are associated with depression, anxiety, ADHD, aggression, self-injury and other behaviors of concern, whether at school, home or in public areas, parents are encouraged

to speak with their child's pediatrician. Your child's pediatrician will be able to direct you to the appropriate sources to seek further assistance and treatment. When seeking behavior support services, parents should be cautious of using telephone directories like the yellow pages as the only source of information and reference. Below are some local resources to seek therapy and evaluations:

Family Matters of Greater Washington

1509 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
202.289.1510

DC Department of Mental Health Child and Family Therapy Center

51 N Street, NE Suite 700A
Washington, DC 20002
202.724.5375

Washington Assessment and Therapy Services

4455 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 400A
Washington, DC 20008
202.537.1780

Howard Univ. Hospital Mental Health Clinic

530 College Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
202.806.5290

DC Department of Mental Health Northwest Family Center

1536 U Street, NW 3rd floor
Washington, DC 2009
202.673.2042

Progressive Life Center

1129 11th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
202.842.4040

Hillcrest Children's Center

1325 W Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009
202.232.6100

Establishing Strong Family-School Communication



The National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education, also known as CADRE, offers a list of specific communication skills that can help parents of children who receive special education services achieve success in developing and maintaining strong partnerships with their child's school.

As a parent, it is important for you to understand that you are the "expert" on your child. You know and love your child like no one else does, and therefore, you are the best advocate for your child. Being a parent and wanting your child to have the most success in school can oftentimes lead to strong emotions such as frustration and lack of trust. The following steps will assist you with managing your emotions and developing the communication skills necessary to advocate for your child when communicating with school officials:

1. Remember to keep your emotions under control. You will be able to communicate better when you are calm. Maintain your focus on the goals you want to achieve for your child and understand it may take negotiation on your part to achieve success.
2. Prioritize your plan. Make a list of your goals from most important to less important. You may have to work on achieving only the top three goals and letting go of the less important goals.
3. Practice active listening. Ask questions when you don't understand and rephrase what you have heard to clarify.
4. Paraphrase or restate what you have said to make sure you are being understood.
5. Offer alternative solutions, or other options if needed. Keep the focus on your child and what it is that your child needs.
6. Apologize and say thank you when necessary. Sometimes we make mistakes, it is helpful to apologize to clear the air and move on. Acknowledging the school's efforts is a way of showing your gratitude and it gives everyone an incentive to continue working effectively for your child.

In conclusion, it is necessary for you to learn and understand your child's disability, to have a long term plan for your child's education, to keep your emotions in control, to write down events related to your child's education, and to keep your focus on achieving success.

Adapted from the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) Steps to Success: Communicating with Your Child's School

School Choice: DCPS Out of Boundary Lottery

School choice is a priority for all parents. In the District of Columbia, parents have a variety of choices in public, public charters and private school options. The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Out of Boundary Lottery remains a popular choice for parents and affords them additional school choice options for their children's education. Through the lottery, parents will have the opportunity to apply for Preschool, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten through 12th grade at a different DCPS school other than their child's assigned neighborhood school. Children seeking a Preschool or Pre-Kindergarten seat must turn 3 or 4 by September 30, 2013.

Below are important facts to know about the 2013-2014 School Year Lottery.

- Begins on January 28, 2013 at 12:00 PM and ends on February 25, 2013 at 11:59 PM.
- Each applicant can apply to up to six out-of-boundary school programs.
- The lottery application must be

completed online ONLY; no paper applications will be accepted.

- Results will be posted online on March 8 and will also be mailed home the first week of April.
- Applicants who receive a seat in the lottery must accept the offer by May 1, 2013, by submitting their enrollment packet by this date in order to secure the seat. Applicants must also be prepared to verify in-boundary and sibling preferences at this time.
- If your child is a special education student and has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), you can still apply for school placements through the lottery. If you have questions regarding your child's specific program, please contact the Critical Response Team at, 202-442-5400.
- Seats remaining after the Preschool and Pre-K lottery are allocated on a

first-come, first-serve basis. Students are not required to attend preschool (3) or pre-k (4).

- If your child is currently out-of-boundary, you do not need to apply to continue attending that school.

Visit dcps.dc.gov to learn more about the Out of Boundary Lottery and to apply. WIN BIG for your child's education! To get all of your questions about the lottery answered, also attend the following event below:

**PARENT WORKSHOP
& INFORMATION SESSION:
DCPS Pre-K, Kindergarten and
Out of Boundary Lottery
Thursday, January 24th, 5:30PM-7PM
AJE Office: 1012 Pennsylvania Ave., SE**

**Hosted by: AJE;
Presented by: District of Columbia
Public Schools (DCPS)**

Tips for Parents: What to Do if Your Child is Suspended from School

School suspensions can be unexpected and often cause an emergency situation for families. Parents can limit the damage of suspensions by following these tips when a District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) or a D.C. public charter school proposes a suspension:

- 1. Get Prepared** - Unfortunately, suspensions are common in DCPS and D.C. public charter schools. Parents should ensure that they are familiar with the DCPS school discipline rules, or their charter school's handbook. Parents can obtain the DCPS school discipline policies on the DCPS website. [1] Charter school discipline policies can be obtained directly from the charter school or from the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board. [2]
- 2. Get Notice and Proof** - Public schools should give written notice about suspensions to the student along with their parent or legal guardian. The written notice should describe: 1) the behavior leading to the suspension, 2) the particular school rule violated, 3) all rights to review related proof, and 4) rights to hearings or appeals. Parents must obtain written notice from the school as soon as possible in order to know the appropriate next steps.
- 3. Get School Work and Instruction During Suspension** - Parents should immediately request work so their child does not miss any available work. DCPS is required to allow students to make up all schoolwork missed during suspensions of less than eleven days. For suspensions of longer than eleven days, DCPS must place students in an alternative school for the duration of the suspension. Charter schools should provide schoolwork to

suspended students. Parents should also request that their charter school allow their student at least some teacher instruction during the suspension to ensure a smooth transition back to school.

- 4. Get a Hearing and/or Meeting** - Parents should take advantage of their right to challenge a suspension at a hearing. Parents should also request that the school allow their student to attend school until they receive a hearing result. Parents can challenge a suspension for any reason. Common challenges are that the accused behavior did not occur, and/or the proposed suspension is not allowed by the DCPS or charter school rules. If a school proposes a suspension or a series of suspensions totaling more than ten days, students with disabilities have a right to meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to determine whether the school is suspending because of a student's disability or a failure to provide special education services. If so, the school must drop the suspension.
- 5. Get Help** - As early as possible, parents should call AJE or their education advocate for more information or to request direct advocacy for their child's suspension.

[1] You may access the DCPS discipline policies at the following link <http://dc.gov/DCPS/About+DCPS/Strategic+Documents/DCPS+Policies> or by contacting the DCPS central office at (202) 442-5885.

[2] You may access copies of charter school handbooks at the following link <http://www.dcpubliccharter.com/Get-Engaged/Charter-School-Discipline-Policies-and-Procedures.aspx> or by calling the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board at (202) 328.2660.



Children with Special Needs, need Parents with Special Skills!

What are Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) and School-Wide Positive Behavior and Support (SWPBS)?

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) and School-Wide Positive Behavior and Supports (SWPBS) are used interchangeably to refer to a research-based and behavioral systems change process for an entire school or district. SWPBS focuses on teaching behavioral expectations to students, in the same manner as any core curriculum subject. The core principles of school-wide PBIS are:

- Develop a continuum of scientifically based behavior and academic interventions and supports
- Use data to make decisions and solve problems
- Arrange the environment to prevent the development and occurrence of problem behavior
- Teach and encourage pro-social skills and behaviors
- Implement evidence-based behavioral practices with fidelity and accountability
- Screen universally and monitor student performance & progress continuously.
- Source: OSEP Technical Assistance on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, www.pbis.org.

- Less reactive, aversive, dangerous, and exclusionary, and
- More engaging, responsive, preventive, and productive
- Address classroom management and disciplinary issues (e.g., attendance, tardies, antisocial behavior),
- Improve supports for students whose behaviors require more specialized assistance (e.g., emotional and behavioral disorders, mental health), and
- Most importantly, maximize academic engagement and achievement for all students.

Source: OSEP Technical Assistance on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, www.pbis.org.

To learn more about PBIS in the District of Columbia schools, please contact the State Contact for PBIS, Chandra Williams at chandra.williams@dc.gov.

SWPBS has many benefits. The most important is that it enhances the capacity of schools, families, and communities to proactively address problem-behaviors before they occur. Below are some additional outcomes that exist in a SWPBS environment: