



SPOT News

SPOT - Special Parents of Teaneck



Complaint Resolution

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When a parent believes a school district has failed to provide services listed in their child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and the matter is not promptly resolved by their case manager or the Office of Specialized Education, parents can file a complaint with the NJ Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs.

On November 8, 2006, SPOT filed a complaint on behalf of several students in the Teaneck School district claiming that related services such as speech therapy and occupational therapy were not being provided as prescribed in their IEPs. The State investigated and confirmed non-compliance regarding related services. They also identified several other violations that were not originally listed in the complaint, including class size violations at TJ, BF and Teaneck High School for in-class support and replacement classes; no replacement science or clinical reading provided at BF as per IEPs; and three aides at the High School who were serving as in-class support teachers in place of certified special education teachers.

The State's corrective action plan calls for the district to review IEPs, therapy logs and schedules at Bryant, TJ, BF, and THS; to identify the compensatory services owed to students; and convene IEP meetings with parents of those students who did not receive their mandated in-class support.

Documentation demonstrating compliance with the plan was due to the State beginning February 28, 2007. SPOT leaders followed up with the district to identify the status of the corrective action plan.

On April 12th, Director of Specialized Services, Anthony Calandrillo and Supervisor of Specialized Services, Sandra Wilkes, met with SPOT president, Diane Berger, and VP, Laurel Abbruzzese, to report steps that have been taken in response to the complaint.

The district reports that they have reviewed the IEPs and therapy logs for students at Bryant and the elementary schools, and have prepared a list of students owed compensatory services. A letter will be going out to the affected families by April 20th. The district continues to review records for the middle schools and high school. Four new therapists have been hired for Bryant to both ensure full compliance with IEPs, and to begin compensatory treatment sessions.

Three new special education teachers have been hired to address compliance issues at the middle schools and high school, with a fourth teacher to begin after the break. Eight teachers will be hired for next year to be assigned to the high school and middle schools. The aides providing in-class support at the high school will be replaced by certified special education teachers.

Parents should follow up with their case managers regarding specific plans for compensation. Parents interested in reading a more detailed summary of the complaint investigation report can find a link at www.spotnj.org

***Visit us
on the WEB!!***

www.spotnj.org



Pathways Project Win-Win



In February of 2007, SPOT worked collaboratively with the district to submit a grant application for the Pathways Project Win-Win. *Pathways for Exceptional Children* is an organization whose goal is "to support the educational, emotional, and social welfare of children with special needs and their families." <http://www.montvillepec.org/>

Project Win-Win would offer mentor training, sensitivity training and grant writing support so that Teaneck could develop inclusive recreational and comprehensive educational programs that appropriately meet the needs of children with special needs in our community.

Currently, there are many families that do not have full access to recreational services in Teaneck, and instead travel long distances for inclusive programs.

Initially, Pathways had planned on starting Project Win-Win in two communities this Spring. Ultimately, they decided that they could not fully commit support to two different organizations at one time. The primary Win-Win recipient for the first year will be Bernard Township, and then Teaneck will be phased in

with their support incrementally. Although we will not follow the exact time-line proposed in the grant description, SPOT is honored and excited about being selected as a recipient of Pathways Project Win-Win support.

Kudos to Renee Redding-Jones, Diane Berger, and Laurel Abbruzzese for their work on the application. SPOT also thanks Tony Calandrillo, and BOE liaison, Margaret Angeli for participating in the interview process.

Motivated by Pathways, SPOT has already begun investigating the Recreational Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities (ROID) grant distributed through New Jersey's Department of Community Affairs. More information about how the ROID program has assisted NJ municipalities and counties can be found at <http://www.state.nj.us/dca/news/2004/pr112304c.shtml>

SPOT is seeking additional member support as we pursue this endeavor. If interested, contact vicepresident@spotnj.org.

"Pathways is turning disabilities into possibilities."

Handicapped-Accessible Playground Planned for Teaneck

Thanks to the efforts of dedicated parents like Cindy Martz and Amy Citron and a grant of \$200,000 secured by Councilman Elnatan Rudolph, Teaneck plans to build a new handicapped-accessible playground at Votee Park. Finally, families will not have to leave town to find equipment that is appropriate for children that are non-ambulatory or with varying degrees of ability. The proposed

playground will be a place where children of all abilities can play together.

In addition to the new town playground, Superintendent John Czeterko reports that the equipment orders for some of the new school playgrounds have also been changed in time to include handicapped-accessible swings. New equipment should be installed next year.



Support for this "puzzling" disorder is often indicated with an Autism Awareness ribbon like the one pictured here.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Grant Awarded to Teaneck

SPOT congratulates the district on securing \$500,000 in additional funding through the NJ Department of Education to establish new programs for students with Autism in Teaneck.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (Pervasive Developmental Disorders) are characterized by varying degrees of impairment in social

skills, communication, and behavior.

Many of the out-of district programs are very costly, and Teaneck is working to improve services in-district. SPOT is anxious to hear more about these new grant-sponsored programs.

To learn more about Autism, visit: <http://www.njcosac.org/cosac2/aboutautism>



Bryant Initiative Follow-Up

In the fall of 2007, the district plans to expand the multi-age inclusion classes that were piloted this year at Bryant School to the three elementary schools. One class would open at Hawthorne, one at Lowell, and two at Whittier. Whittier already began piloting this program for the '06-'07 school year.

SPOT has had many conversations with the district over the Bryant Initiative since it was first announced. We are working hard to monitor the program, and are in the process of coordinating a forum this Spring to allow parents to raise questions. Check back at our Web site at www.spotnj.org for updates.

At a March meeting of the Board of Education, the Department of Specialized Education offered statistics on three literacy measures for the Bryant students. The district reported a 54.2 percent improvement in letter identification, a 40.6 percent increase in word test, and an 11.4 percent increase in hearing and sound recognition. These statistics represent a comparison of the average scores for the entire school, which includes pre-K, kindergarten and some first graders, and an average of the previous three years (during which the classes contained only kindergarten students). SPOT leaders have asked the district to present a more comprehensive analysis of the data that would better reflect the efficacy of the new program. We asked for a comparison of the kindergarteners in the all-kindergarten classes to the kindergarteners in the multi-age inclusion classes, as well as the kindergarteners from the previous year. We also asked for a comparison of special education students only, and the addition of math, science, and behavioral measurements. We believe that this type of analysis is essential so appropriate modifications can be made as the program is expanded to the elementary schools. We believe that close monitoring and adequate support are essential for successful inclusion.

The multi-age inclusive classroom model, dubbed "Erasing the Lines," was presented to parents last spring by Tony Calandrillo, director of special education, and Suzanna Kaplan, principal of Bryant School. Nine classrooms were targeted, combining either kindergarten and first graders or kindergarten students and pre-school students in full-day classrooms. Students with classified disabilities and those considered to be "at risk" were also included in the classrooms. Therapy services were to be infused into the classroom so that non-classified students could also benefit from the additional support.

The classrooms have been led by Instructional

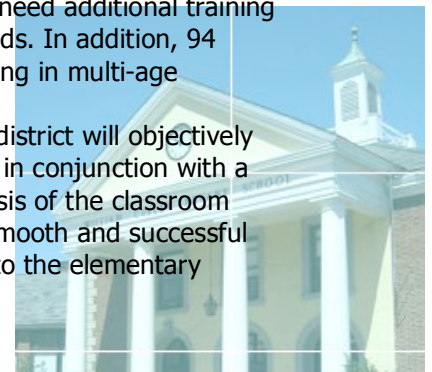
Management Teams with content leaders in four areas: literacy, math, science/social science, and social skills/behavior. According to the presentation, these teams would utilize "data-driven reporting instruments" to monitor the performance of students, classroom, and the curriculum. This data-driven assessment process was to be used to monitor the need for staff development and modifications of the curriculum.

Before the program opened last September, SPOT had many conversations with the district about our concerns with the presence of adequate staff to handle both the infused service hours and therapy hours mandated by students' Individualized Educational Plans (IEP). We also raised concerns about whether the teachers and the staff were adequately prepared for this major change. Since the beginning of the year, SPOT members have been speaking out at school board meetings, voicing our concerns about professional development and requesting more data. Very little data to support this program have been presented to the Board of Education so far.

In addition to the recent presentation of the three literacy statistics, the special services department presented a teacher survey in November. According to the survey, 95 percent of the teachers responding reported that they agreed that the children enjoy learning, and 88 percent agree that the children interact well in the multi-age inclusion classes. In addition, 69 percent said they agreed that the Instructional Management Team concept would help teachers improve student achievement.

SPOT raised concerns, however, about the survey results regarding professional development. Only 55 percent of the teachers agreed that they were confident with implementing the multi-age inclusion program, while 90 percent said they need additional training in inclusive teaching methods. In addition, 94 percent wanted more training in multi-age inclusion.

We are hoping that the district will objectively consider the survey results in conjunction with a more comprehensive analysis of the classroom data in order to ensure a smooth and successful expansion of the program to the elementary schools.





SPOT Workshop: Advanced Advocacy Strategies

Renay Zamloot, Education Advocate

Monday, May 21st, 7:30pm THS

SPOT will host an Advanced Advocacy Strategies workshop on Monday, May 21st, featuring Renay Zamloot, Education Advocate. Learn how to negotiate without arguing, understand the art of applying the law to secure needed services, learn how to redirect counterproductive dialogue, learn to organize your documents and how to write letters that get results. As an equal member of the IEP team, you will learn to become an effective IEP meeting participant. Renay Zamloot is not an attorney and her ideas should not be construed as legal advice.

Special Parents of Teaneck

Special Parents of Teaneck (SPOT) is a district-wide support and information group dedicated to supporting children with special needs in Teaneck.

Upcoming Meetings
7:30 pm THS

April 16
May 21
June 18

SPOT ELECTIONS
JUNE 18

Career and Academic Empowerment Forum

Sponsored by Alpha Achievers and Department of Specialized Education

Saturday, May 19th, 8:30am-2:30pm, Thomas Jefferson MS

**College Recruiters
Job Networking Opportunities
Educational Presentations & Workshops
Hot Breakfast & Lunch**

RSVP to: 201-862-1200 x6018 or CareerDayTJMS@TeaneckSchools.org
Include number of people attending & need for childcare (K& up).

School Board Elections
Tuesday, April 17th ~~~ Don't forget to VOTE!!!

JOIN SPOT TODAY!

First Name(s): _____ Last Name: _____

E-mail: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Please Circle: Parent Professional Relative Other: _____

Disabilities that you are interested in: _____

Language(s) spoken: _____

Membership Contribution: ___\$10 ___\$25 ___\$50 ___\$100 ___Other: \$_____

Check (✓) all that apply:

___ Please send all SPOT mailings

___ My contact info may be shared with other parents

___ Please keep all personal information confidential

___ I am interested in volunteering



Please return form with check made out to "SPOT-Special Parents of Teaneck". Forms may be returned to your child's school. Be sure to write "SPOT" on the envelope. You can also email your form and information to: spotmembership@spotnj.org