



Principals' Weekly November 29, 2011

Chancellor's Memo



Dear Colleagues,

As you know, over the last year and a half, more than 260 schools across the City have been participating in “Phase 1” of reforms to improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities. Building on the work of these schools, we will start implementing reforms throughout the City in September 2012. In the meantime, we will continue supporting schools and networks in preparing for this transition this spring. As we expand this effort citywide, our goals remain the same:

- to close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities;
- to increase access to and participation in the general education curriculum for students with disabilities; and
- to build school-based capacity to support the diverse needs of students with disabilities through greater curricular, instructional, and scheduling flexibility.

For too long, educating students with disabilities has meant separating them from their general-education peers. We know that this model leads to some schools over-serving students with disabilities, while others under-serve them. Most importantly, we know that not all of our students are graduating ready for independent living, college and careers. This must change.

Over the past year and a half, Phase 1 schools have already shown improvement in serving students with disabilities. Phase 1 schools have shown a 16.6% decrease in recommendations made to more restrictive environments year-over-year, compared to a 3.9% decrease in non-Phase 1 schools. I am encouraged by the progress of our Phase 1 schools and excited about expanding this reform citywide.

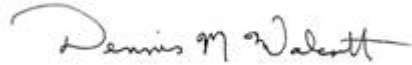
To change instructional practices across the City effectively, we will need to make challenging but critical changes in the ways we enroll students, fund our schools, and organize our special education operations. Most importantly, we will need to work within our school communities to change the way we think about educating children with disabilities, helping all of our students meet the higher Common Core standards and graduate from high school college- and career-ready.

To this end, every network team has added an instructional coach dedicated to special education. These coaches provide professional development to support all school staff—both general education and special education—in implementing more inclusive classroom practices and developing high-quality IEPs that leverage flexible programming. The goal of every IEP should be to ensure that each student gets the precise supports needed to minimize the impact of the student’s disability on his or her education, and to maximize his or her academic potential. With this goal in mind, as we begin the “Turning 5” process to prepare kindergarteners to enter elementary schools this year, we will be working to ensure that students are evaluated by the schools they are most likely to attend in the fall. This will enable schools to make more flexible recommendations to meet the needs of the students entering kindergarten in fall 2012.

Please share the information in this letter with your School Leadership Team and your school community. In the near future, we will provide opportunities for you and your teams to discuss policy changes and identify the additional supports you need to create more inclusive environments for all our students.

I look forward to continuing our work together to ensure that we improve opportunities for students with disabilities in all our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dennis M. Walcott".

Dennis M. Walcott
Chancellor