



What do the reforms mean for families of students with disabilities?

The New York City Department of Education wants to give all of our 1.1 million students, disabled and non-disabled, the best chance at successful, fulfilling, and productive lives in a world that increasingly demands high levels of knowledge and competence.

Over the past five years, parents, teachers and principals have been telling us what works and what doesn't work in special education. We've been listening. We asked Dr. Thomas Hehir of the Harvard Graduate School of Education to conduct an extensive, independent analysis of our special education services.

We have implemented many of the recommendations from that report, including:

- ◆ Placing more students with disabilities into general education classrooms with their non-disabled peers. More than half of all school-age students with disabilities (52.2%) are now educated in general education classes with special education supports, an increase of 7.5% since the Mayor and Chancellor announced Children First in Spring 2003. During the same time period, the number of students in collaborative team teaching classes has more than doubled from 10,068 students to approximately 22,000 students;
- ◆ Providing professional development focused on strategies to improve access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Since 2003, more than 4,000 teachers have been trained in the Wilson Reading program, a research-validated Orton-Gillingham based reading program. Since 2003, more than 2,500 teachers have been trained in Schools Attuned, a research-based program to assist teachers to differentiate instruction;
- ◆ Holding principals more accountable than ever for improving the performance of all students in their schools, disabled and non-disabled alike, because we believe that principals should be responsible for *all* of their students.

We want to keep families informed about what is happening in special education and to that end we have compiled some questions and answers that we hope will address your concerns. Our choices are based upon what you have asked for and our desire to put our children's needs first by creating great schools designed to serve *all* of our students and families.

Key Questions Answered:

- WILL THE EVALUATION PROCESS CHANGE FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE DISABLED OR SUSPECTED OF BEING DISABLED?
- WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO DISTRICT 75?
- HOW WILL SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES BE PROVIDED WHEN THE REGIONS NO LONGER EXIST?
- WHAT IS THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DOING TO CONTINUE TO IMPROVE SPECIAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES?
- HOW WILL THE DEPARTMENT INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?
- HOW WILL THE DOE PROVIDE PARENTS WITH KEY INFORMATION?



Q. Will the evaluation process change for students who are disabled or suspected of being disabled?

- A. No. The 10 Committees on Special Education (CSE) offices will remain in their current locations and there will be no change in the evaluation process. Students in public schools will continue to receive evaluation services and have their IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings at their school, where personnel who know the child and are likely to provide service to the child can participate fully in this process. Students in non-public and Charter schools will continue to receive evaluation services at the CSE offices. The CSE offices will report to the newly-created Integrated Service Centers (ISC).

Q. What will happen to District 75?

- A. District 75 will remain in place to support District 75 schools. It will continue to be a separate citywide district for children with severe disabilities. The Children First school reforms seek to continue to work with the district to improve the delivery of services and increase options for students. District 75 schools that wish to receive non-mandated supports outside of District 75 may purchase services from the School Support Organizations although they are not required to do so.

Q. How will special education services be provided when the regions no longer exist?

- A. Services will be provided through three organizations:

Integrated Service Center (ISC)

Each borough will have an Integrated Service Center (ISC), which will offer all schools one-stop assistance with mandated and operational services related to human resources, payroll, budget and procurement, transportation, food services, facilities, grant management, technology, health and safety, student suspensions, youth development, and some elements of special education. Each ISC will have a Director of Special Education Services and will be staffed with our best, most experienced managers, special educators, and analysts who will streamline the process of deploying special education personnel, contracting out for services, and issuing and approving services by non-DOE independent providers for students attending public schools. The exception is those students attending District 75 programs. District 75 will continue to perform these mandated services for their schools.

The Committees on Special Education (CSEs) will continue to be staffed with experienced managers and special education personnel who will continue to arrange for special education services including contracting out and issuing and approving services by non-DOE independent providers for students in *non-public and charter schools*.

In the past, CSE personnel were required to perform many of the important operational functions for all public, non-public and Charter schools, which stretched them beyond capacity. Many parents reported that this slowed down the process of getting services to the children who need them. Now, in each ISC, there will also be a new IEP (Individualized Education Program) specialist unit that will provide quality review oversight and enforce consistent standards for IEP development throughout the system. Supervisors of School Psychologists and Speech Teachers and increased numbers of Supervisors of Occupational and Physical Therapy will be located at the ISC to develop strong networks of senior-level service expertise and improve service delivery.

Office of Student Enrollment, Planning and Operations (OSEPO)

The central Office of Student Enrollment Planning and Operations (OSEPO) facilitates student placement, enrollment, zoning and choice programs on a citywide basis for all grade levels. They will also place students in collaborative team teaching and special education classes once they have been recommended for special education services if they cannot be served in their current school. OSEPO will work with District 75 to identify and place students in need of District 75 programs. The transfer of the placement process to this centrally-operated office, with the full weight and authority of the Chancellor, will ensure better access to special education programs across the City and will help the DOE plan and allocate special education classes where they are needed. This will also ensure greater participation of students with disabilities in choice programs.

School Support Organizations (SSO)

This spring, all principals, in consultation with their School Leadership Teams, will choose a School Support Organization (SSO) that will provide curricular and instructional support for their students, including students with disabilities. Some of the SSOs will be led by and primarily made up of New York City public school personnel and others will represent the best that colleges, universities, and other non-profit organizations have to offer. Schools will be able to choose the SSO that provides the support needed by their teachers and students. This will keep decision-making in schools and make it possible for schools with similar needs to easily share and replicate best instructional practices.

Q. What is the Department of Education doing to continue to improve special education instruction and services?

- A. In response to parent demand for a standard Orton-Gillingham based reading program, we now have more than 4,000 teachers trained in the Wilson Reading System, which will continue to be a key element of the core curriculum.

The DOE is piloting a Special Education Lead Teacher program in 30 middle and high schools in September 2007. The program's goal is to foster mentoring relationships in a school and draw upon the skill and competence of experienced special education teachers to help improve instruction. The Special Education Lead Teacher will teach students for three periods each day and then provide three periods of professional development covering best instructional practices for students with disabilities.

The central Office of Special Education Initiatives/Office of School Improvement will continue to provide technical assistance and support to schools on special education services. This support will be enhanced by the addition of 20 senior special education staff to continue to build the capacity of schools to serve students with disabilities.

There will continue to be an expansion of integrated services for students with disabilities by providing technical assistance and planning grants directly to schools, particularly at the high school level, to develop new inclusion programs and to replicate other best practices for serving students with disabilities. In September 2007, the Department projects opening an additional 150 Collaborative Team Teaching classes.

Thirty Special Education Training and Resource Center (SETRC) teacher trainers will be aligned with support networks to provide teacher training on specific special education topics of importance such as creating a quality IEP, developing appropriate goals and objectives, literacy instruction, and utilizing behavior management techniques in the classroom.

To ensure that principals have in-depth knowledge of special education, a more rigorous and comprehensive special education component will be added to principal training provided through the Leadership Academy.

The Office of the Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning will remain focused on special education instruction by supporting the replication of model programs and developing pilot programs in collaboration with colleges, universities, and other partners. The provision of rigorous academic content area instruction and effective transitioning of students with disabilities to middle and high school will be given unprecedented attention.

We are changing the school budgeting process so that all schools and all students receive their fair share of the City's education resources through Fair Student Funding (FSF). For special education classroom support, schools will receive funds based on the number of periods a day a student requires services rather than funding based on a specific service delivery model. Including these special education classroom support services in FSF will encourage innovative instructional support models that keep students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and provide schools greater flexibility in aligning dollars with the needs of students with disabilities. The DOE will provide schools with funding for the full number of special education students that can be placed in a classroom regardless of whether a class is fully registered. This will allow schools to open classes and maintain a sufficient number of seats for students who may be recommended for the program later in the school year. It will also help to ensure that those children can be educated in their current school.

The funding model does not change our current methodology for providing funds to schools for IEP mandated services including Related Services, IEP teachers, IEP paraprofessionals and District 75 programs.



Q. How will the Department increase accountability for the performance of students with disabilities?

- A. A major component of the Children First reforms is increasing school-level accountability. We will improve the delivery of special education services by monitoring school performance, creating new incentives for better performance and providing direct consequences to schools that fail to meet benchmarks as part of the accountability initiative. We will also improve the quality of information you receive both about your child's performance and his or her school environment.

Special Education Compliance Report

You've told us how important it is for you to know whether your child's school is providing mandated special education services. To keep you informed, we are creating a Web-based Special Education Compliance Report that will indicate the timeliness of special education evaluations and delivery of services including any inequities in the classification rate of English Language Learners and minority students. The report will become available during the 2007-2008 school year. We will let you know when and where to look for this report.

Other accountability tools include:

ARIS (Achievement Reporting and Innovation System) is a first-of-its-kind data management system that is being developed by the New York City Department of Education working with IBM. ARIS will collect and analyze information about student academic performance to help educators and parents make smart decisions that improve the academic progress of students and their schools.

Progress Reports will grade each school with an A, B, C, D, or F starting in September 2007. Schools that get A's will be eligible for rewards, while schools that fail will face consequences. Special emphasis will be placed on the progress of students with disabilities.

Quality Reviews are 2-3 day visits by experienced educators who talk to parents, students and staff; observe classrooms; and review how schools use data and set goals to improve learning for all students. Schools receive an overall quality score which is reported on the Progress Report. The entire Quality Review report is online: go to www.nyc.gov/schools. Enter the school code or name where it says **FIND A SCHOOL** and click **GO** – this will bring you to the school's Web page. Under **About Us**, click on **Statistics** (a link on the left side of the page). Scroll down to where it says **Quality Review Report** and click.

Periodic Assessments are in-class assessments that students take to help teachers find out which concepts and skills students understand. Teachers use this information to learn what they should focus on with each child.

Q. How will the DOE provide parents with key information?

- A. We will address parents' questions and concerns with greater speed and with high-quality information. Parents who have questions or concerns about the special education services their child is receiving will be able to go directly to the school and then, if necessary, to a parent representative in their Community School District Superintendent's office. A citywide directory of parent representatives in the Community School Districts will be available by the beginning of the school year. Additionally, all parent coordinators and other family support personnel with positions created as a result of the Children First reforms will attend training on special education procedures and processes. Parent leaders will work with the Department to develop training for parent representatives and to make recommendations to increase responsiveness of schools to families of students with disabilities.

To make sure that our field personnel are able to respond in a timely and effective way to questions and concerns with high-quality information, the central Office of Special Education Initiatives is creating a DOE Staff Call Center so that principals, parent coordinators and other school personnel can make a single phone call to get fast, accurate information to answer families' questions. In the coming months, look for streaming video modules, parent conferences, and more detailed written materials.



Department of Education

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