



RAISING THE BAR FOR ALL STUDENTS

NEW YORK CITY'S SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) serves more than 1.1 million students and their families in nearly 1,700 public schools. We are committed to student success and to providing parents and families with useful information and multiple opportunities to be engaged in our city's public school programs and initiatives. This overview is designed to explain the DOE's special education reform and how it relates to your child's education. For a more detailed explanation of the DOE's special education services, please read our Parent Guide to Special Education, which outlines all the possible services and describes each program.

WHY IS SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM NECESSARY?

There are more than 175,000 students with disabilities in New York City public schools. These students have a broad range of disabilities, including learning disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, Autism, and others. Over the past four years, we've seen more students with disabilities graduating from high school—and we want to build on this success by continuing to improve the quality of special education services in each of our schools.

Historically, special education in New York City has involved placing students in a separate class, apart from their peers without disabilities. However, we know that to be most successful, students with disabilities should have access to a range of services

and spend as much time as appropriate in a classroom with students without disabilities. National research and results from districts across the country show that educating all students together leads to:

- Teaching tailored to each student's unique needs;
- More students with disabilities graduating from high school ready for college and careers;
- Improved learning and greater success for *all* students—with or without disabilities.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THIS REFORM?

Through this reform, we will be strengthening the way schools across New York City approach educating students with disabilities. Our goal is that all students with disabilities are:

- Held to high academic standards;
- Taught in the same class as students without disabilities as much as possible (known as placed in the "least restrictive environment" that is academically appropriate);
- Provided with special education services as appropriate for their needs; and
- Able to attend their zoned school or the school of their choice, while still receiving the support they need to succeed academically.

HOW WILL THIS REFORM STRENGTHEN THE SERVICES STUDENTS RECEIVE?

In order to ensure that all students are educated in the least restrictive environment that is academically appropriate, school teams will work to develop services and supports that minimize the impact of a student's disability and maximize the opportunities that each student has to participate in general education. This means that a student might have different special education services during different parts of the day. For example, if a student needs more support in reading, she might work directly with



a special education teacher to develop her reading skills, but might be in a general education class for math. Her special education teacher might work with the math teacher to help support her reading needs in class. This program of services and supports would be accurately reflected in her individualized education program (or IEP).

WILL THE IEP PROCESS CHANGE?

The process and procedures around IEP meetings will not change. If you or your child's school would like to make a change to your child's program, your child's IEP team—which includes you and the people who work with your child—will meet again to determine what changes are necessary to provide the greatest opportunities for your child to be on a path to graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Remember, an IEP can be amended at any time. In addition, every IEP includes a place to reflect parental suggestions and concerns, and all families have the right to ask that their suggestions and concerns are addressed in the document.

WILL THERE BE ANY CHANGES TO THE WAY THAT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ENROLL IN NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS?

Beginning in September 2012, articulating students (in kindergarten, 6th grade, and 9th grade) will be able to attend the same schools they would attend if they were not recommended for special education. This can mean access to a student's zoned school or to a school of his or her choice.

Additionally, except in rare circumstances, students with disabilities will no longer be required to transfer schools because of changes to their IEPs. Previously, if a school did not have a specific program, the student had to switch schools. Now, all schools will be expected to meet the needs of the majority of their students with disabilities. The only circumstance in which a student would transfer schools is if the student requires a highly specialized program designed for students with the most significant disabilities, such as the Autism Spectrum Disorder Nest Program or District 75. The process for placing students in District 75 schools will not change. Parents also have the right to request transfers based on certain criteria such as medical or travel hardships. Please check with the Office of Student Enrollment in your borough if one of these reasons applies to your child.

HOW IS THE DOE SUPPORTING STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND TEACHERS WITH THESE CHANGES?

The DOE provides a variety of training opportunities for teachers and other school staff who work with students with disabilities. In particular, we are working with teachers and other school staff to improve their ability to write strong IEPs, work with students with disabilities to master the Common Core standards, and develop strategies for supporting positive student behavior.

If you have questions about the way students with disabilities are being taught in your child's school, you should contact the school's parent coordinator, parent association, or principal. You can also call 311 anytime to reach an expert trained in responding to educational issues, or call the district family advocate in your district superintendent's office.

LEARN MORE

- Read the Continuum of Services for Students with Disabilities in the Parent's Guide to Special Education (<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/ParentResources/default.htm>);
- Attend spring 2012 Parent Workshops (<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/News/Understanding+the+New+IEP+Form.htm>) to learn more and to ask questions about the special education reform;
- Sign-up for the ARIS Parent Link (<https://arisparentlink.org/parentlink>);
- Get your copy of the NYC Family Guide (<http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/NYCFamilyGuide.htm>) and learn useful tips to keep your student on track for success;
- Learn more about the DOE's vision for students and schools by reading *Raising the Bar for Students and Schools: Our Commitment to Action*.

For more information, or to download and print this fact sheet, visit <http://schools.nyc.gov/>. Or call 311.